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***Achieving Global Recognition: Higher Education  
Rankings and the Commitment to Quality in Saudi  
Arabia's 2030 Strategic Vision***

***By***  
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***A Thesis Submitted to the School of Education of University of Glasgow***

***In Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy***

***Supervised by Dr. Robert Doherty***

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## Abstract

This study has as a primary focus the devising of strategic recommendations to help the government of Saudi Arabia achieve its goals, particularly the objective of having at least five Saudi institutions among the top 200 global universities by 2030. The research explored the challenges in realizing the educational targets set in The Saudi Vision 2030, aiming to position Saudi Arabia as a global education leader. In examining the background of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the study delves into the historical evolution of the education system and its alignment with contemporary aspirations, notably the Saudi Vision 2030. This comprehensive overview provides context for understanding the current higher education landscape and the imperative for transformation.

The conceptualization of the western form of the university, from its origins as a Church institution to its evolution into a globalized modern entity, forms a backdrop to an understanding of the university of today. The concept of excellence in higher education is explored, tracing its trajectory from ancient universities to the present era. This examination encompasses the historical development of formal quality systems and the contemporary imperative for achieving world-class status. The development of higher education quality and quality assurance frameworks are considered.

The study explores ranking systems in higher education, addressing their development, impact, and significance to improving institutional status and global position. With reference to a wider framework of neoliberalism and its globalizing affects, attention is given to how Saudi universities confront the complexities of global ranking systems and their implications for



institutional advancement. By considering critical perspectives and emerging trends in ranking methodologies, the research identifies pathways for enhancing the global competitiveness of Saudi institutions.

The study underscores the interconnectedness of historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and future aspirations in advancing Saudi higher education. By synthesizing insights from diverse domains, strategic recommendations are formulated to support Saudi universities towards global prominence, aligning with the ambitious vision outlined in Saudi Vision 2030.

In addition to a review of the relevant literature, ten interviews were conducted with senior leaders from universities, Vice Rectors for Planning, Development, and Quality. The participants, from both the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, possessed practical and operational expertise in higher education ranking focused activity.

This research identified crucial factors pivotal for advancing the higher education system towards its strategic goal. The study highlights the significant roles of academic research, the cultivation of research identity, marketing, publicity, financial resource attraction, academic and administrative autonomy, and academic reputation. These elements are collectively decisive to any effort to elevate the global rankings of Saudi universities.

The research indicates areas recommended for enhancement in Saudi universities, including bolstering academic reputation, promoting research, investing in research and development, fostering international collaborations, and attracting international students.

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The primary focus of this study was the development of broad strategic recommendations that could aid Saudi Arabia to successfully achieve its goals in relation to the ranking of its leading universities. This research specifically addresses the objective of ensuring that by the year 2030, at least five Saudi institutions are ranked among the top 200 universities worldwide. Many universities recognize the essential role of research in establishing a world-class reputation. Research output is identified as a key indicator of a university's merit and objective performance (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). A significant portion of the global ranking of an institution is influenced by academic standing, the number of research citations, and employer reputation (Dill and Soo, 2005). Universities are increasingly focusing on enhancing their brand in the pursuit of higher rankings (Altbach, 2015) and collaborating with other high performing institutions and engaging in partnerships with industry as a way of adding to their global recognition (Marginson, 2007). The emphasis of this study has centered on the importance of identifying key strategies and initiatives that could enhance the quality of education, research, and innovation in Saudi universities. By doing so, it aimed to provide advice towards elevating their global standing and reputation, ultimately contributing to the broader vision driving Saudi Arabia's education, economic and social development goals. While acknowledging the historical developmental path of higher education, ranking systems were investigated from both a critical and functional operational perspective. The establishment and dominance of ranking systems is framed within the wider context of the neoliberalization of the sector, with ranking systems emerging as both an effect of neoliberal rationality (Harvey, 2005) and a driver of the global neoliberalization of the

sector. From a review of the literature on ranking, seven strategic areas are clearly identified for action together with four overlapping areas that emerged from the analysis of interview data gathered from senior university officers. It is argued that these dimensions are core to sector improvement and the achievement of higher-ranking institutions in the Saudi context.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in Western Asia, and it is the fifth largest country in the world and is the 40th most populated state. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is advantageously located in the Arabian Peninsula, with the Red Sea to its west. The kingdoms northern neighbours include Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan. The eastern neighbours include Oman, Qatar, and UAE and across the Gulf of Aqaba, Egypt is the nearest neighbour of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia among the northern African countries (Allhibi et al., 2019).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very important in the Islamic world. There are two main reasons which make the Kingdom significant. The holiest cities of Mecca and Medina are located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom is the second largest producer of oil in the world and is the biggest exporter of oil in the world. This country is home to a huge multicultural population as a result. Although the density of population in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not very high, the population growth rate in the country has declined steadily. Notwithstanding, the percentage of the young people in need of quality education still makes up a large portion of the country's population (Almalki and Ganong, 2018).

In general, it can be said that the growth and development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are considered important in the Muslim world. This is because the Muslims coming from other Islamic countries of the world also look up to the Kingdom. Being an important country in the Muslim world, and an important economy, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia today has a keen focus

on transformation through modernization (Mahmood and Alkahtani, 2018). To appreciate the modernization of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in terms of the economy and education system, understanding the dimension of culture is vital.

From a cultural point of view, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shows the shades of Islamic culture that it has adopted from the times of the Prophet (PBUH). Pre-Islamic culture in this region was very different. The local Bedouin culture that exists among the nomad tribes shows a glimpse of the old culture that existed in this region. However, with the advent of Islam, the Saudi Arabian Peninsula went through a significant cultural change (Alsanoosy et al., 2018). The existing culture of Saudi Arabia is thus dominated by the impact of Islamic values and norms.

From early history, this peninsula was divided into four regions, Najd, Southern Arabia, Hejaz, and Eastern Arabia. In 1932, these regions were joined together into a state by King Ibn Saud. It was a monarchy that largely governed a population of uneducated Bedouins. However, things changed for the Kingdom in 1938 when oil was discovered. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has the second largest oil reserves in the world, while its gas reserves are also the fourth largest.

From an economic point of view, the Kingdom is an important economy in the world and is included in the top 20 economies in the world. However, when it comes to education, the country has been spending less on higher education in general as compared to other economies of similar size. Notably, 8% of the budget in the State is spent on militarization (Iqbal et al., 2019). This is an aspect that is been criticized in relation to investment in higher education.

The Kingdom has a significant percentage of its population under the age of 25. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranks high on the index of human development. Along with the issues of health and economic growth, where the country has performed well, the issue of higher

education has today become a policy focus. Policy reform has put a core focus on education; however, the speed of this process remains slow.

## **1.2 Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia offers free public education to its citizens. The economy of Saudi Arabia supports free education for all and free public health care. Although, from the public's point of view, it is a benefit to all citizens, the costs that these sectors add to the budget every year, and there is a public policy concern in relation to the modernisation of education in the Kingdom (Alsayyari et al., 2019).

There is an ambition to use education to produce individuals who will be in the position to compete in the labour market (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020) and meet the requirements of the modern labour market, supplying a variety of industries and avenues that will enhance the GDP of the country. This purpose also reflects an ambition to shift the dependence of the country on the oil and gas sectors. The key to this radical change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in part understood as reform to the education system.

Education is free for the citizens of Saudi Arabia from the primary school to the tertiary level. Across the various levels of education in the Kingdom, the state is spending around 8% of GDP. The issue that is usually highlighted with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's education system is not the level of investment but the quality of education it offers. One factor is the way the existing system of education focuses to a significant extent on religious content (Alabadulaziz,2019). The number of hours each student spends on religious studies in public schools and colleges is much higher in comparison to the number of hours students from other countries spend. Alotaibi (2022) concludes that this leads to a situation where the education

system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not effective in producing the workforce that can take up the challenges of modern business and work environments.

This is the main reason that the education system in the Kingdom is criticized for being inclined towards religious studies rather than focusing on contemporary areas of knowledge and skills. Although the attention of the State has been directed towards educating young minds, in the past, less attention was paid to higher education in the Kingdom as compared to what was required (Quamar, 2021). In 1932, when the Kingdom was formed, education was available to all, notwithstanding, only a selected few in the urbanized part of the country had access to basic education. However, King Abdulaziz Al-Saud was concerned with this situation and launched an extensive education program. This program led to the creation of many schools, but at this time there was no institution for higher education in the Kingdom. The Ministry of Education was formed in 1954 and the first university in the Kingdom was formed in 1957, located in Riyadh. Before the formation of King Saud University, there was no local higher education institution in the Kingdom. Today the focus of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has moved to the point that higher education is a public policy priority in part response to a growing young population (Alkhayyal et al., 2019). Higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia includes bachelor, masters, and doctorate degrees. Education to bachelor level is free, and in recent years, the number of students being admitted to universities has been on the rise.

It has been observed that many individuals between the age of 25 to 64 have not managed to acquire the required level of education in Saudi Arabia, primarily because the State did not have the developed education system to provide individuals in this age group with the required level of educational opportunity. The government of Saudi Arabia has in the past encouraged

female instructors, with more than 80 percent of the teachers present in the education sector being females (Aldiab et al., 2019).

The OECD (2020) report, *Saudi Education at a glance*, the number of students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attaining bachelor-level education is higher than the average in the OECD countries or the G20 economies. However, when higher degrees levels are compared, the number of students getting higher degrees in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is low. This data from 2018 shows that when it comes to higher education, OECD countries and the G20 economies are way ahead (Alghamdi, 2020).

Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is progressing on a modernising arc. This has happened over an extended time due to various factors. Although the State has been dedicated to improving the literacy rates in the country, there has been two significant issues with education management. First, the curriculum in the country was dominated by religious sentiments. This led to a situation where contemporary education was limited in the Kingdom. The Saudi population, even with higher education degrees, was considered less prepared in the international market due to this reason. To overcome this issue, the Kingdom needed to focus on the quality of its education by providing higher-quality education institutions (Aldiab et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Higher Education was formed in 1975. Once this ministry was in place, it led to a significant improvement in higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The number of higher education institutes in the country kept growing under the impact of this ministry, and by 2014 there were 25 public universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In parallel with public universities, the number of private universities increased. Another important aspect that the ministry focused on was providing quality education in contemporary subjects. In

1970, 7000 students were enrolled in higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, by 2022, the number has increased to 1 million. The number of female students in higher education has also increased.

The tertiary sector of Saudi Arabia mainly comprises three categories, universities, colleges, and certain technical institutions. At the current time, Saudi Arabia has 60 universities, which is not adequate to meet the rising demand for third level education. It is important to highlight that the major portion of these universities and colleges are located in the public sector. Many parents in Saudi feel more comfortable sending their children to public sector educational institutions as they perceive that they are more protected there. However, in recent times, the government has sought to partner with the private sector in establishing more educational institutions for the youth population (Alghamdi, 2020).

In the recent decade, one important aspect that the education ministry in the Kingdom has contended with is the fact that with 50% of its population under the age of 25, the country needs to plan its higher education sector. A highly qualified workforce is needed to take the country to new heights of development. However, if higher education opportunities are not provided, there is a risk of this being a vital loss for the Kingdom. There have been various reforms that the ministry has undertaken to support the growth of higher education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the most recent and significant one being the Saudi Vision 2030 (Mitchell and Alfuraih, 2018).

### **1.3 Saudi Vision 2030**

Saudi Vision 2030 can be defined as a strategic framework that is focused on reducing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's reliance on oil exports. At present, the economy of the country is



highly dependent on oil. Around two-fifths of the GDP of the Kingdom comes from oil exports and sales. There is another percentage of the economy that is dependent on oil distribution companies for their revenue. Since the 1970s, the Saudi government has realized that its reliance on oil is a risk and need to be reduced. Vision 2030 is the framework that aims at diversification of the economy as the answer to this problem (Alharthi et al., 2019).

It is proposed that the Saudi economy can turn around without relying on oil export by developing its public sector and diversifying the economy. The approach includes presenting a softer image of the country while ensuring that investment can be increased in activities that are not related to the oil and gas industry. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered to be a textbook case of the resource curse. Due to excessive oil reserves, the country has not developed its economy in other dimensions. One key factor contributing to this situation is the lack of local higher education opportunities (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018). In the past, the education offered within the country was not aligned with the requirements of the international job market and the system failed to produce qualified employees with good contemporary skills. One important aspect to consider in the Saudi Vision 2030 is that the goals that this vision presents cannot be achieved without paying attention to the quality of higher education being offered within the Kingdom.

As far as higher education development is considered, Vision 2030 is focused on the development of higher education institutions to ensure that a higher quality native workforce is available. To develop a vibrant, urban, and culturally rich society, and a stable economy, the approach toward education is understood as standing in need of being transformed. The transformation planning for the country includes clear objectives (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

The national transformation program has developed multiple aims with the help of which the economy of Saudi Arabia is to be improved. This program aims to improve the infrastructure of Saudi Arabia, introduce new technology, and enhance the functioning of different industries to generate higher GDP (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

First, to improve the quality of education, the quality of teachers in the public education system is to be improved. The strategy is also focused on improving the learning environment that exists in the Kingdom. This is to be done by revisiting the curriculum being taught to students at different levels of education. There are various contemporary skills that the students need to learn and have taught. For example, financial efficiency is required, and it will be part of the curriculum, the focus in general, is on ensuring that the requirements of the modern job market are met (Bataeineh & Aga, 2022).

One significant development included in The Vision 2030 for higher education is that investment in private education should be increased. The Kingdom's economy is burdened by public education and health. To develop the workforce further, and to offer high-quality education to the young population, private investment in the education sector is to be encouraged (Dahim, 2018). In this framework, it is assumed that the educational development of students should be considered directly linked with their professional development.

Vision 2030 provides the national strategy for the growth and development of the educational leadership in the country. This vision has also focused on the development of technical education in the country. The gap between labour market requirements and the skills that Saudi students gain through their education needs to be filled by to them contemporary skills.

This vision also includes KPIs against which the performance of the education ministry is to be measured (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

#### **1.4 Implications for Education and Culture**

The education and intellectual growth of every single person are called for in this blueprint for the year 2030. It has been observed that the majority of Saudi Arabia's population is comprised of people who will need access to education and higher education institutions. This suggests that in the not-too-distant future, this population will require and demand that they receive a higher level of education. For this reason, the government of Saudi Arabia is taking action that will potentially make it feasible for the younger generation to obtain the necessary information and guidance that they will need in planning their futures (Alharthi et al., 2019).

The primary objective that has been set by the government of Saudi Arabia with the assistance of vision 2030 is to raise the level of education that is made available to the people who live in Saudi Arabia. Because of this, one of the primary goals of the government's initiative is to improve the longevity of the educational system. To do this, the Saudi Arabian government intends to expand the number of educational institutions located inside the country's borders so that the educational system may become more adaptable to the needs of students (Mitchell and Alfuraih, 2018).

Saudi Arabia is committed to fostering reforms that will benefit the country as a whole. To that end, the government of Saudi Arabia is pursuing economic diversification on several fronts. Taking this goal into account, it is the ambition of vision 2030 to have at least five of their universities in the world's top 200 by 2030 (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2020).

Additionally, the Saudi Arabian government has particular goals that it hopes to accomplish in the long term through the appropriate implementation of the vision 2030 strategy. Vision 2030 paves the way for Saudi Arabia's government and its citizens to concentrate on the establishment of a strong higher education sector, it also paves the way for Saudi Arabia's government and its citizens to invest money in the construction of the necessary institutions and the funding of established organizations. With such reforms, it is hoped to elevate the sector while simultaneously encouraging youth to remain in Saudi Arabia for higher education and employment (Mitchell and Alfuraih, 2018).

If the government can accomplish this goal while simultaneously attracting students from other parts of the world, they will be in the position of successfully market their educational institution to people in other countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is dedicated to bolstering the functional capacities of a diverse range of individuals and industries located inside the borders of the Kingdom. The government has high expectations that, with the help of these individuals, they would be able to build Saudi Arabia and, therefore, enjoy a wide range of advantages (Mitchell and Alfuraih, 2018).

Considering this objective, the government of Saudi Arabia has the ambition that at least five of its universities will be listed among the top 200 universities worldwide. By achieving this, the government can potentially make it possible for the education sector of Saudi Arabia to keep on developing in the long run, and thus, provided the majority of the individuals with the education they need to help the country progress and develop in future. With an educated youth and individuals, it becomes more possible to ensure that the country continues to progress and grow (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2020).

### **1.5 Ambitious strategic planning: Modernization and Internationalization**

Through its 2030 vision, the government of Saudi Arabia has the goal of fostering a society that is prosperous, ambitious, and vibrant. For this reason, it has been seen that the government has been continuously working with various agencies through which they may reach this aim for the welfare of society. The government's overall goal in pursuing this vision is to raise the level of living enjoyed by those already residing in Saudi Arabia. The government will be able to ensure that innovation and creativity are encouraged, and that new ideas are brought into the economy with the help of which different industries can continue progressing and growing in the long run.

The establishment of a high-quality tertiary system will not just be available to those living in Saudi Arabia; rather, it will also encourage people from all over the world to travel to Saudi Arabia to take advantage of the educational opportunities that are available. Because of this, the government has taken action to attract various private firms to spend alongside the government in the construction of various educational facilities (Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018). This is significant since the government does not have the capital with which to potentially launch numerous new institutions all at once to accommodate the expanding population.

Vision 2030 can make it possible for the government as well as the residents of Saudi Arabia to open up possibilities for innovation and enhance the outlook of citizens. When individuals start to open themselves up and encourage different ideas and individuals to participate in the economy (Al-Otaibi, 2020), diversity is an important step, which is depicted in this vision, and thus, the government, as well as the individuals, need to make appropriate decisions and plan appropriately regarding vision 2030 (Demmelhuber, 2019).

## 1.6 Significance of this study

The development of strategic recommendations that will help enable Saudi Arabia to be successful in accomplishing its aims and goals is the primary emphasis of this study. The particular objective that this research is responding to is the objective that: "by the year 2030, at least five Saudi institutions should rank among the top 200 universities worldwide"

(<https://vision2030.gov.sa/en/media-center>)

Because it focuses on the unique problems that beset the education system in Saudi Arabia, this study is timely. The administration of education is handled in a variety of various ways depending on the jurisdiction. Action to enhance a nation's education system without an awareness of the specific environment and factors that influence education in that country would be undermined. This research aims to explore answers to the obstacles that the Saudi Arabian education system will experience in fulfilling the educational goals outlined in the Saudi Vision 2030 in relation to moving higher education institutions to a rank among the top 200 universities worldwide. These goals were established to help ensure that Saudi Arabia would be a world leader in education by the year 2030.

My positionality, or self-understanding in relation to this research, is motivated and informed by being located in the sector as a Saudi academic and emerging researcher with an interest in the field of higher education educational management. My experience as a researcher has led me to the conclusion that education is key to effecting genuine change in any community. As a greater number of individuals achieve higher levels of education, minds can begin to place a greater emphasis on new and creative ideas, which will ultimately result in the production of more possibilities for the general population.

When I look at the demographic pyramid for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the vast majority of the country's population is within the age group where education will be of primary import. This segment of the population has the potential to transform and revive the nation by bringing it into the contemporary era economically. However, to accomplish this objective, students must have access to higher education that is of a sufficient standard of quality. My interest in this subject is strong because I am an individual who is intimately linked to this issue as a faculty member of a higher education institution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The expansion of options for higher education is something that I have a strong interest in seeing realised. That is the main reason I have chosen to focus my attention on this subject throughout this research project.

I have conducted this research in both Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. The rationale for selecting these two countries is influenced by access and context. As a researcher and academic in Saudi Arabia, my position, or positionality in relation to this research, led me to be motivated to identify and analyze the challenges that Saudi universities encounter in their efforts to enhance their international rankings. This includes understanding their perspectives on global recognition and other related issues. Conversely, my location in the United Kingdom afforded me convenient access to explore the perspectives of leading universities that are consistently achieve high rankings. These institutions serve as a benchmark for practices and strategic and operational action towards elevated university rankings. It was possible within the limitations of time and factors such as the pandemic to compare and explore the experiences and strategies of universities in these two jurisdictions.

## 1.7 Research objectives

Developing strategic advice that is sensitive to the cultural context for reform and improvement within the higher education sector of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the context of the 2030 Saudi Vision is aim of this project. By answering the project research questions below, in the context of the 2030 Saudi Vision, this project seeks this develop relevant strategic advice.

This is exploratory research, and it will respond to the following questions:

1. In the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, how are quality and worldwide recognition interpreted, and how are institutions understanding and planning for the objective of reaching global rankings in 2030?
2. What are the elements that impact the growth of Saudi universities, and what are the characteristics that will allow them to be acknowledged as being among the greatest universities in the world?
3. What external and internal constraints are hindering the growth of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, and how are these challenges affecting the overall emphasis and quality of Saudi Arabia's higher education?
4. What are the potential pathways for Saudi universities to integrate into the list of the best universities in the world by applying global quality standards and maintaining the country's cultural identity?

The theoretical framework for this project is presented across chapters, two, three and four, that in turn analyse the idea of the university as an institution, which historically dates back to 1100AD, the evolving concept of excellence in higher education, and more significantly, the idea of ranking systems in the context of a globalising neoliberalism. It is important to note that the



chapters work together in developing the idea of the university and what has come to be understood and ranked as quality in university education, each contributing towards understanding the contemporary outcomes of higher education that are present across nations. For instance, from the first chapter on the idea of a university, it is clear that institutional models have changed and developed over the centuries. Such developments have been seen in terms of the changes in the criteria for access which have been altered by elements of politics, religion, race, or the economy. For instance, in the USA, during the 20th century, the higher education system was significantly expanded, introducing new developments, from the GI bill to incorporating more genders equality.

The third chapter considers the idea of excellence in higher education. The idea of quality and improving the quality of higher education, what is today expressed in terms of excellence in higher education (Brusoni et al., 2014), is explored. Developments that saw the understanding of excellence in higher education shift over time have included changes to curriculum, pedagogy, organisation, technology, and human resource development.

Chapter four is devoted to exploring ranking systems in the context of neoliberalism and the neoliberalisation of Higher Education as a high-level theoretical frame. Neoliberalism is considered briefly as a political ideology and as a policy type and institutional form. It is the later form and type of applied neoliberalism that is used to explain the rise, dominance and future durability of ranking systems and the operation of a logic of competition and institutional comparison. Connections are made between the fundamental concepts of neoliberal reform and the realm of higher education, creating a climate for the establishment and expansion of ranking metrics and comparisons. This section posits three dimensions of neoliberalism, establishing a foundation for examining the influence of neoliberalism on the global higher education sector.

The logic of neoliberalism sheds light on the relationship between the dominance of neoliberal ideology, ranking systems, and the nature of reform and desire for elevated comparative status in Saudi Arabia's higher education system.

Ranking systems, their evolution, expansion and fundamental elements are explored. Two elements stand out as influential regarding ranking, internationalization, and global reach. Consideration is given to the QS world university ranking, the Times HE world ranking, and the ARWU, systems developed with the sole purpose of deploying underlying strategies to rank universities, and by extension national higher education systems (Berger, 2001). Ranking creates one measure of quality, a reference point for quality improvement and problem-solving in higher education learning. When institutions battle to improve their rankings, innovative approaches can be deployed, improving the education outcomes that are measured. This approach has implications for Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and its ambitions for the system of higher education.

This study incorporates a qualitative research design, a methodology based on its underlying nature in seeking to understand and explore the experiences and views of groups or persons (Maxwell, 2012). Here, the study made use of primary data over secondary data, intending to produce insightful findings to help in formulating an answer to the objectives of this project. The methodology of this paper incorporated the use of semi-structured interviews to collect data. This was an effective approach to data collection as it allowed the researcher to address the research terms without diverting from the underlying research question.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the background of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the context for the research. Saudi Arabia has experienced exponential growth after oil was discovered in the country. The wealth of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia largely comes from its possession of oil. However, in recent times, the Kingdom has realized that its economy is at long term risk being heavily dependent on oil. Vision 2030 is a strategic planning framework aimed at guiding the country to reduce its economy's dependence on oil. The focus of this Vision 2030 is to diversify the economy.

This chapter has highlighted, Vision 2030 can only succeed in bringing strategic change that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by bringing significant change in its education policy and system performance. The Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognizes that graduates from Saudi universities are not always qualified for the international labour market.

Historically, this is because education in Saudi Arabia has been largely inclined towards religious content. Vision 2030 has guided the Ministry of Education in placing contemporary subjects for study in as much detail as religious content. Diversification of the economy is only possible if the workforce being produced by the education system of the country provides the resources to take up challenging modernized jobs. The skill gap between what the international job market requires and what the Saudi students have to offer needs to be bridged.

The strategic planning that the country has done so far can bring in the desired results only if education planning is aligned to meet the same objectives. This is what the Ministry of Education is focused on. This research is significant as it provides insights into the issue of quality in higher education and how any gap can be bridged. The following chapter will explore

the background and nature of the university, with a focus on the history and evolution of the idea of the university as a context for considering the concept of higher education quality and excellence in education and the key focus on university ranking systems and the strategies that allow universities to climb up the ranking ladder.

## **The Idea of the University: 1100 AD to Present**

### **2.1 Introduction: From a Church Institution to the Globalized Modern University**

The university system can be described as one of the primary tenets of modern education. While previously, such higher educational institutions used to be controlled by religious organizations such as churches, modern universities are State or private entities. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the evolution of the university as an institution.

The university has gone through many different iterations between the years when the Middle Ages were slowly giving way to the dawn of the Renaissance and on towards the twenty-first century. In the medieval period the primary vehicle for education came from institutions supported by the Roman Catholic Church, such as monasteries and other schools led by the clergy. Over time, schools passed from the control of the church to public and private entities. From the twelfth until the nineteenth centuries, the primary paradigm of the university was to provide a learning community that would serve as its end: the creation of a basis of knowledge and experience that would prepare the student for any sort of opportunity that the graduate would want to pursue going forward. The German model and the American land-grant model were some of the most popularly used throughout the world beginning in the nineteenth century (Kerr, 1991).

In the nineteenth century, there was a gradual motion from teaching to research as the overall distribution of the time that professors spent in work, although teaching took up more of the time. Between 1870 and 1940, there was more and more interest in research as the exponential growth in technology continued. In 1940, a survey of 125 academic institutions revealed that approximately 20 million dollars were going toward research and engineering within those

schools and that \$10 million of that money was spent by ten of those 125 universities alone (Kerr 1991).

In the postwar era, as we will see below, the university community expanded significantly. After World War II, the service personnel who had served in the war and came back, would all receive a college education from the American government in exchange for their service, thanks to the G.I. Bill. The need for research increased as well thanks to the technological requirements of the cold war and a global industrial war that made advances necessary in just about every practical field for countries to remain competitive (Kerr, 2001). Echoing James Bryce's book, *The American Commonwealth*, Kerr reiterates that the United States, towards the end of the 20th-century, was home to about 125 research universities and more than 100 credited with purely doctoral studies. In these institutions research was the primary faculty activity, a significant increase from about 20 universities with that relative apportionment in 1963 (Kerr, 2001). Much of this funding for research and development came from the federal government, as the interest of maintaining and increasing a competitive edge over the Soviet Union meant that the American government would spend whatever was needed on institutions. This was a time of particular boon and enhancement of the US education system, and such a comprehensive development during one period of time had not been seen in other nations.

While higher education was critical to the Cold War heralding a race between two competing global ideologies, Caverley (2007) observes that the U.S. had to make a significant investment in the defense industry. Effectively, the race for political and military superiority would mean less and less budgetary allocation to higher education efforts. The effect would especially be felt within the public university. In periods of fiscal challenges, public services, other than defense, are often negatively affected. The growth of conservative majorities in state

legislatures and the number of Republican governors have meant that budgets are shrinking considerably – which is a factor in the increase in tuition levels. This also means that the university is becoming a more practical institution, not just in the West but in other parts of the world as well (Maskell & Robinson, 2012). The idea of a university experience designed to provide a liberal education that is sort of general preparation for life in an upper-class profession is no longer realistic. It was gradually being found that only a theoretical education, as used to be the norm for universities, does not translate to specific, transferable skills that would be necessary to build a career. Instead, it is becoming, more and more, a place for practical preparation, with less emphasis on a common core of essentials and with more emphasis on a specific professional future

Taking into account the current scenario, approximately three million students were studying in a country outside their home nation as of 2010, which represented a 57 percent increase over 2000 (Wildavsky, 2010). A number of universities are also gradually opening up various international branches. The postwar boom in university education in the United States is currently being matched in Asia, as China's number of university-enrolled students increased by 500% between 2000 and 2010. Estimates of the number of globally mobile students (those studying in countries other than their home nation) are as high as eight million by the year 2025 (Wildavsky, 2010). Between now and then, while India and China are the top two nations when it comes to exporting students to other countries, China had already become a net importer of students by 2010, with other Asian nations sending their students to China. It is likely that as the university experience becomes more global, it will also continue to become more practical (Wildavsky, 2010). Gradually, the net effect is likely to assume a pro-Western liberal ideology.

Mainly, the outcome would follow the anachronism between educational content and the universal assumption of Latin as the language of religion, especially Catholicism, rituals.

Thus, it seems evident that there is certainly a trend of globalization when it comes to university education. Starting from the institutions themselves to the students, everyone wants to go global. This can be related to both the better educational opportunities that can be found in an international arena as well as the cultural exposure that comes along with it.

## **2.2 Early Concepts of the University**

The first universities could be traced back to as early as the ancient human civilizations. It seems that since when humans began to form societies and live in them, they became aware of the need of higher education. Although instrumental in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge, the ancient university, as El-Abbadi *et al.* (2008) show while highlighting the historic state of the University of Alexandria, would be distinct from the modern institutional setting.

A visit to the sites of such ancient civilizations as Greece and Rome demonstrates the high level of learning that members of those societies were able to reach. The complex social organization that the Roman Empire had provided had allowed for innovators to develop such ideas as public water systems, through the aqueducts; advanced concepts in architecture that included such ideas as the dome; public planning that provided for the construction of roads, and the use of concrete in projects. After a group of Germanic tribes brought an end to the Roman Empire in the West, that organization went away, and so did many of those accomplishments. While Christianity had tense relationships with the state, the fall and eventual collapse of Rome allowed the Church to reposition itself. Making the observation, Barbero (2018) writes that while Charlemagne was a ruler with continental power, in his stead, the Roman Catholic Church



emerged as an influential sociopolitical force. The first strong pope was Gregory the Great, who held office from 590 to 604, and the consolidation of power that he brought to the institution meant that political rulers could no longer control Europe without an alliance with the Church (Pruitt, 2016).

During this time, much of the learning that took place took within the walls of the Church; the vast majority of the literate people in Europe were in the clergy. Essentially, the collapse of the Roman Empire resulted in a period of cultural, economic, and intellectual decline. Writing on the emergent concept of the Dark Ages, Powers (2005) states that the setting was instrumental in fostering the Age of Enlightenment. Particularly, Powers (2005) adds, the period was marked with emphasis on reductionism and the scientific method. Consequently, the period saw the rise of the university. Many medieval monks were also artists, and many of the Christian monasteries during that period encouraged learning and literacy. There was a "Carolingian Renaissance" that took place near the dawn of the ninth century when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as the "emperor of the Romans" (Pruitt, 2016). During this period, educational reforms emerged and there was the significant emphasis placed on preserving classic Latin writings (Grendler, 2004). The Carolingian minuscule (a standardized handwriting form) emerged, and for the first time, writing involved punctuation and spaces between words.

While the Carolingian Renaissance would provide a brief respite from the intellectual decline that had taken place after the fall of Rome, the idea of the university was still a long way off. The monastery was the locus of learning, which meant that to become an academic, one first had to take vows and enter an order with the church (Pruitt, 2016). While investigating the dawn of the university movement, one stumbles on the person of Peter Abelard. Regarded as the founder of Scholastic Theology, the framework served as a precursor to the university.

Nevertheless, the setting, while basic, lacked the facility for a legitimate academic program for years after the passing of Abelard (Rashdall, 1895). However, it was Abelard who started the intellectual momentum that would lead to their establishment.

The monastic schools, at the dawn of the twelfth century, still kept their doors open to secular students, although they were not taught in the same classes as their ecclesiastical peers. However, many monastic schools were in the process of shutting down their secular education, and the Cathedral schools and independent secular instructors took up the pupils who had not taken vows but wanted an education (Courtenay et. Al., 2000). Abelard had taught at the Cathedral School of Paris, which would become the first and greatest university in northern Europe. His way of approaching questions, Scholastic Theology, involved the “attempt to apply dialectical methods to the discussion of theological problems” (Rashdall, 1895), which represented the first pedagogical steps into the world of the University, which had to deal with the contradictions presented by the Augustinian Theology, with Platonic philosophy as its base, and those conclusions that the study of Aristotle had led independent thinkers to perceive. The conflicts between medieval Realism and medieval Nominalism would lead to the emergence of the Universities from the purview of the Church and make the University a separate institution.

What was the curriculum at work in the early university? As Pankova *et al.* (2016) observe, during the Antiquity, the university was founded on the concept of trivium and quadrivium. While the latter focuses on the four mathematical disciplines of geometry, astronomy, music, and arithmetic, the former’s attention was on the verbal disciplines of logic, rhetoric, and grammar. The idea of the liberal arts remained, but they fell in many cases under the classification of the three philosophies (metaphysical, moral, and natural) which had not fallen within either of the two taxonomies of learning identified in antiquity (Ridder-Symoens, 1991).

Initially, the trivium received more emphasis than the quadrivium in the universities of Europe. At Oxford and Paris, the two leading universities in Northern Europe, rhetoric was almost entirely removed from the trivium, leaving grammar and logic behind, as rhetoric became a sub-topic within grammar. The study of grammar, in turn, took on largely logical considerations. According to Woolfson (2006), within the Italian universities, such as Padua and Bologna, rhetoric took center stage. Indeed, the writer adds that there was a period when the university at Bologna focused purely on rhetoric as an elemental of the trivium. Some of this had to do with the different areas of emphasis among the various universities. Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge had as their area of emphasis the study of theology; for just about all students who were not part of a mendicant order or who were studying at a Cathedral School, one of these three universities would be their destination. While papal supremacy was key to the Catholic Church, the dictates at the religious seat of power would be held as true and binding. As a result, and mainly due to the Church's authority in religious instruction, Cobban (2017) writes that theological teachings would be limited to the three universities. Admission to the university during this period seems to have been relatively easy, provided that one had the privilege to take part in the same. Going to the university instead of partaking in paid work was a great luxury that not many could afford. However, there were no admission requirements based on social standing, citizenship, intellectual testing, or linguistic ability (Ridder-Symoens, 1991).

There were not even specific, fixed terms of study. Anyone who had gained admission could start studies on any particular day of the year, and there was no minimum age for entering university (Nauert, 1990). Minors could run into difficulty when they took the oath of matriculation, but that did not stop them from entering university. The only requirements for university admission in those days involved holding status as a baptized Christian and established

moral conduct. Access to higher learning during the era meant that one had to provide proof of legitimate birth. However, Cobban (2002) adds that the requirement was on the personal affirmation of legitimate birth rather than the presentation of formal acknowledgment. So as long as one had the means to transport oneself to university, one could begin studies.

There are two reasons for this broad nature of access to admission during the early centuries of the university era. One had to do with the fact that the early university was designed to be a community where individuals would gather to learn together, and the other had to do with the way education worked during the Middle Ages. Higher education itself continued to be greatly influenced by the hierarchy in society, as only the upper-class people had the privilege to take part in the same.

Concerning the idea of the early university as a community, when European universities first opened, they were much different from their formal descendants that appear today. Instead, universities had a more communal organization, much like what one would find in a family or a worker's guild (Ridder-Symoens, 1991). So as universities would change over the centuries, they would slowly transform from communal institutions into organizations dominated by institutional policy and largely devoid of the personal connection that formed the spirit of their establishment.

Concerning the second, it is important to remember that there was nothing like the modern system of education in the Middle Ages. The modern system has a fairly tight hierarchy to it, with the teacher and student delineated, and with a rigid system in place that a student must negotiate if he or she wants to "graduate" high school or qualify for university in some other way, depending on the country in which the student lives. One example of this comes from Germany, wherein the fifth grade, students are placed on one of three tracks: eight years of academic preparation for university, six years of preparation for a vocational apprenticeship, and six years of remedial

education for slower learners. This decision is made based on test scores and grades; students spend their first four years in school studying under the same teacher, and the teacher plays a significant role in the decision process as well (Carapezza & Noe-Payne, 2015). In the Middle Ages, there was a much more muddled line between teacher and student. If you attended school, either on a primary basis or at a university, you were called a “schola.” If you were a teacher, you were called a “magister,” but if you were a “student,” that term had more to do with the actual process of studying than to a certain status (Ridder-Symoens, 1991). One could be a “student” at a primary institution or a university. This relative looseness concerning terminology suggests that the modern idea of the “student,” where there is a formal process of application and admission, was not part of the early university experience.

In addition, several other schools sprung up at the same time as the universities and offered a relatively parallel experience. During the Middle Ages, with the universities focusing on arts, these additional schools sought to provide skills, at a similar level, that were crucial in professions demanding literary proficiency (Newsome, 2012). Some examples of these were the institutions that the Brothers of the Common Life would open, in Holland and in what would become Belgium, were examples; Erfurt had a “school-city” in place before the city’s university opened in 1392.

Thus, considering the time period in which they operated, the universities provided a solid base of higher education to those who were able to take part in the same. However, the nature of the society itself, which was extremely based on hierarchy, continued to undermine efforts to expand participation.

### 2.3 Renaissance Humanism and the New University

Taking place between the 14th and the 17th century, The Renaissance period featured a surge in art, literature, and other artistic creations. While exploring history, Ingelhart (1998) observes that the era, which marked the creation of the Gutenberg printing press, featured personalities such as the multitalented Leonardo da Vinci, Rene Descartes, the French Philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, the English author of Leviathan, Dante, and Niccolo Machiavelli. Being influential, these figures have informed the course assumed by a number of the famous painters, scholars, artists, sculptors, etc. that we can see, had their origin during the renaissance period or were influenced otherwise by renaissance art.

As the Renaissance grew in Europe (and the population began to recover from the ravages of the bubonic plague), there was humanism emerging in popular culture that simply had not been presented in earlier centuries. The knowing cynicism about the Roman Catholic Church had emerged in a public fashion in the stories of the Decameron, Giovanni Boccaccio's set of stories set during the plague and using stories about the sins of the clergy to make up much of its entertainment (Britannica, 2014). The Protestant Reformation was still ahead, but humanism prepared to take academia from the Church as well.

Although the 16th-century Reformation period is a distinct era, the instrumental role played by the church renders it critical. That is, the period was marked by resistance against the Catholic church, especially concerning systemic corruption. Tingle (2014) observes that while doctrinal ideals would be expected in the assumption of roles and privileges, some within the church would subvert the efforts. Indeed, corrupt practices of Simony (selling privileges in the church to nobles) and the sale of indulgences (selling documents showing the forgiveness of sins) formed much of the outrage that Martin Luther felt concerning the Church, and the refusal to

admit that such scientific discoveries as those by Copernicus and Galileo, who developed the theory that the Earth revolved around the sun. We know now that this is true, but the Church, especially on account of papal supremacy and the centralized authority, held a different scripture-based interpretation of the science (Leveillee, 2011). Their insistence in maintaining corrupt practices and using the power of ex-communication emboldened humanists in their critique of the Church and their movement away from orthodoxy in intellectual matters.

According to Bentley (2014), similar to other social phenomena within the European continent, humanism spread on the backbone of war. Bentley further adds that France's Charles VIII attacks on Italy, while marking the collapse of political unity, were instrumental in the spread of humanism from the country throughout the continent. Aldus Manutius, formerly a university teacher in Venice, opened a publishing company, and he built a library that could reach across the continent (Ridder-Symoens & Ruegg, 2003). The century between 1450 and 1550 produced changes that influenced the development of the university in five ways. First, Correa (2010) writes that the continent's explorers facilitated the exposure of the European culture to the rest of the world. Second, the voyages of historic figures such as Columbus and da Gama were essential in ensuring a shift in perception. Again, as Ingelhart (1998) observes, the development of the Gutenberg printing press was instrumental in the establishment of new communication methods. Also, the era saw a rise in cultural awareness, mainly through the rhetoric precipitated during the Reformation, that was independent of the Church. Lastly, there was an increase in the permanence of tradition on the university campus.

Overall, this was a period of continuous change, and that impacted the academia, higher education, and universities as well. Higher educational institutions like universities of that time

were able to receive the footfalls of a number of artists, scholars, and other personalities who were bright and shining stars.

#### **2.4 The Separation of the Secular University**

However, up till now, higher education was an affair which was thoroughly involved with the realm of religion. But a need was gradually being felt for separating the two, so that education can be more impartial in nature. The next era of university education would see a development of the same.

Universities began to set themselves apart from these other schools because of their position of relative privilege in the community. Previously, before secularization, the universities, in an attempt at using academic metrics as a form of distinction, would take up the duty of conferring academic degrees upon the learners (Cantoni *et al.*, 2018). Some people already had positions as teachers (because academic credentials were not required to teach at least into the sixteenth century) who entered university to have a degree.

One example of this was a comedy about a Latin school that featured a seasoned schoolmaster who was also going to university to pursue a degree. The irony was the vigor with which the schoolmaster was chasing after top marks at school. However, even more important, in some cases, than the chance to attain a degree, was the access to a social circle that universities offered that were not available elsewhere. As time went by, though, it became more difficult actually to attend university with no prior academic experience. As the eleventh century turned to the twelfth, towns were starting to set up their city schools to provide competition with the church schools. It is hard to say with much certitude what the rigor in those schools involved and the degree to which attending those schools helped students prepare for the work that they would face



at university. Even so, starting in the fourteenth century, it seems fairly clear that schools served as a sort of established prerequisite for attending university if one looks at the places of origin for the students who registered.

An increase in the formal nature of the curriculum began to appear as well. The masters within the faculties of arts greeted students who came from a diverse series of backgrounds and provided a sense of common academic background by requiring that those students can carry out some basic work in Latin. These basic requirements were known as "pedagogic," in which there was some basic knowledge that students needed to take part successfully in a faculty's coursework. The primary schools that provided education in towns began to take on the business of instructing students in the "pedagogic." In some areas, the masters of the town schools were supervised by the universities; in some of these cases, the university provided the masters for the schools (Ridder-Symoens, 1991).

The experience of matriculation, then, became the initial gateway that students had to negotiate to gain the status that university membership conferred. It was one thing to join a group of students working with a "magister," but it was quite another to become a member of *Universitatis* through matriculation. At this point, the student would take an oath, place his name in a register and pay the required fee (Gabriel, 1969). As Grendler (2002) writes, the process would be the formal protocol in the institutions in Northern Europe and even Northern Italy. What we see at this point in the spectrum of change for the university is the establishment of an administration that had not been part of the institution previously. In Paris and universities in southern Italy, universities had never maintained their registers. The process of matriculation had been the responsibility of the individual magisters, rather than of a centralized administration within the university. As universities grew, teachers started keeping records about their students;

at Oxford, this process appears to have started before 1231. In Paris, the process became official in 1289 (Ridder-Symoens, 1991). The individual registration that the magisters kept at these universities allowed teachers to keep records about the job that students did concerning certain pieces of work, as well as to separate people who had merely joined the magister's circle from those who had earned official status at the university.

The difference, though, was that in earlier years it was the teachers who had provided verification of university membership rather than a centralized administration, and it seems that this was how it worked earlier in the Middle Ages as well. It was not until the middle of the fourteenth century that formalized registers appeared. Initially, these registers were privately kept instead of stored as a central university document. One example of these is a manuscript that is older than 1268 and was kept at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. The magister had written down sixty names, each next to a number that seems to indicate the years each student had put in for work.

Once things became more formal, though, in the later parts of the fourteenth centuries, a rector's register, or a centralized list of students, became increasingly common. Initially, universities in central Europe started keeping the registration lists, but the practice spread elsewhere in Europe as well. An important part of this process was the oath, known as the "juramentum." This provided a sort of symbol for the legal validity of matriculation. If the student would refuse to take the oath, then the rector would reject the student's request for official status at the university.

The idea of swearing an oath to a university might seem somewhat unusual in modern times, but back then people would swear an oath to the town where they lived, and business owners would swear oaths to their guilds, and so it would have seemed more normative then.

Writing on the subject, Gabriel (1996) opines that the oath, while tailored to the interests of the specific university, would focus on an oath of obedience to the rector over the university, of fealty to the university statutes, of obligation to promote the university's welfare, and of promise to renounce any gesture of vengeance for any injustice. As far as the question as to when students were old enough to take their oath, regions followed canon law, but that varied, as Toulouse had a minimum age of ten years old, while Oxford had a minimum age of sixteen. Minors could attend without taking the oath at one of the many institutions that did not have a minimum attendance age. In those cases, minors had a conditional promise made on their behalf by a father, guardian, or teacher, that they would take the oath once they reached that minimum age.

Generally, once the process of the oath became more formalized, the students entering university were fourteen or fifteen years old who were studying with a faculty of arts. Students pursuing coursework in theology, medicine, or law would generally come in around the age of eighteen unless they had sufficient social rank to have gained an exemption.

One element that has long been a reality of the university experience is the fee schedule. Universities had statutes that established admission fees that officially applied to all students, but in actuality only applied to the students who came from the social classes that could afford them. It was those payments that kept the doors of the universities open; this was long before the era of the endowment fund (Ridder-Symoens, 1991). Then as now, there was some significant variation in the costs of fees among the universities. There were social aspects to those fees as well. Even in the early years of the university, there was an equivalent of need-based aid, as the fee that students were charged could be less than (or more than) the stated fee, and it could even be waived, depending on the financial situation of the student. Interestingly, members of the nobility or senior clergy faced a surcharge on their fee, and the families were expected to donate

additional funds on top of that surcharge (Ridder-Symoens, 1991). So while such elite clubs as the “President’s Circle” were still several centuries away, for the well-heeled, the idea of giving more to the university when one was wealthy was not new at all.

As can be seen from this discussion, during this stage, the idea of universities having a more important place in the society and in human life in general, was growing. It was for this reason, that a number of efforts were made for ensuring that they can function properly without an inordinate amount of external influence.

## **2.5 The University Between the Renaissance and the Twentieth Century**

However, between the renaissance and the twentieth century, there has been a massive overhaul with respect to what a university and university education mean and represent. For that reason, the structure and working of the universities changed as well, to reflect this change in mindset.

John Henry Newman, an Oxford academic and clergyman, delivered a series of lectures about the nature of the university, and those ideas were published as *The Idea of the University* in 1852. In his view, a university exists as a community of intellectuals, and the pursuits they carry out inside the walls of the institution need not have any external benefit or purpose, but should instead serve their ends. His idea was that a university should produce a "man who has learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze, who has refined his taste, and formed his judgment, and sharpened his mental vision" (Newman, n.d.). It would not be necessary for a person, upon completion of one's studies, to have immediate preparation for a career as a "lawyer, or a pleader, or an orator, or a physician..." (Newman, n.d.) but instead that he emerges "in that state of intellect in which he can take up any one of the sciences or callings I

have referred to, or any other for which he has a taste or special talent, with an ease, a grace, a versatility, and a success, to which another is a stranger" (Newman, n.d.).

From Newman's words, it is clear that, at least for him, the notion of the university should be that of a general, common experience, rather than a locus of specialization. Attending university, for him, should instill a particular approach to thinking, to learning, even to life that would prepare one for whatever choices one wanted to make after graduation. A possible objection to this view, of course, is that in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was not nearly the same technical complexity in the professions that there is today (Robson, 1985). The fastest mode of transportation was the train, but it had not been that long since the horse was the fastest conveyance from Point A to Point B. Also, there were some other elements of Newman's vision for the university that make it problematic for a more modern application. He also argued that religious truths were an important part of general knowledge and served as a basis for all other teachings (Deboick, 2010).

Newman also had a sense that the fallen nature of humanity would keep people from being able to improve themselves without God. While the events of the twentieth century have emphatically expressed what can happen when humanity makes technological discoveries – both for the benefit and for the grotesque – that religious vision does not square with modern sensibilities. Whether that speaks to a modern failing, or a modern advancement will depend, of course, on one's take on religion and morality. In the increasingly secular atmosphere that marks the twenty-first century, though, views like Newman's do not find acceptance outside the segregated part of academia known as the Christian college or university, which has its criteria for accreditation because of their differences with what have become accepted standards for academic institutions (Smith, 2018).

One university that shows many of the changes between the eighteenth century and later centuries is the University of Pennsylvania, founded by Benjamin Franklin and currently a member of the Ivy League. Many of the educational opportunities available during Franklin's Day, in Europe as well as in the North American colonies, had focused on the training of men for the ministry (Bogue & Aper, 2000). Franklin's vision was a university that would teach a class of political and business leaders, and his vision was one that many of the leaders in Philadelphia embraced. In his essay "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," he suggested that classes should take place in English, not Greek or Latin, and the curriculum would include geology, geography, natural history, and modern languages (McConaghy, Silberman, & Kalashnikova, n.d.). As the paper later shows, while these were critical to the state of the institution, the modern setting, in deference to contemporary scientific and technological imperatives, perceive as dispensable (Phillips, 1997).

Franklin's goal for the University of Pennsylvania was to provide students who could hold public offices such as magistracies, and that even those of lesser means could emerge with the qualifications to provide quality education as schoolmasters. The original academy that would later take the form of the University of Pennsylvania had six classes, the first of which would begin with English grammar, spelling, and the reading of short stories and fables. By the end of the sixth class, the students would learn philosophy, logic, rhetoric, and history, reading Addison, Milton, and Locke, with translations of the masterworks of such writers as Vergil and Homer. Franklin asserted that this education would provide a background suitable for any profession (McConaghy, Silberman, & Kalashnikova, n.d.).

So we see that Franklin's vision was not that different from that of Newman, although Newman's contained a great deal more reliance on the value of religion. Franklin's view of the

world was a much more secular one, but he still saw the university as a transformative place of learning that would make the graduate prepared for any sort of specialization that he would choose. As the twentieth century neared, though, it would become clear that this sort of experience is not what the university would remain.

Ultimately, the focus of the changes in the university system during this time, primarily dealt with reducing or removing the exclusivity statuses from the universities. The knowledge that these institutions of higher education would disburse, would not be something that were only the realm of scholars and experts. But they should be understandable and accessible by the common man as well.

Emerging in the 19th-century, Humboldt's Ideal, a German model of higher learning, would rise as a holistic integration of studies and research (Scott & Paolo, 2016). Essentially, it was a system that would facilitate comprehensive learning through immersion in both sciences and the arts. While it would be a critical path for general learning and cultural scholarly works, the model's state would eventually inform the development of the research university.

Indeed, its pioneer, Wilhelm von Humboldt, basing his arguments on the rising learned middle class, called for general education. Particularly, he observed the need for cultivating individual character and mental capabilities that would be fundamental for the creation of informed citizens. The model's foundation is on the enhancement of the individual and his state as a world citizen. To Humboldt, Scott, and Paolo (2016) observe, the individual would require the university's training to attain autonomy. However, it was through their empowerment within the academic setting that they would attain academic freedom.

A look at the model reveals that it is built on the notion that research was necessary if based on current affairs. Indeed, the creation of a world citizen would demand an individual

intelligent enough to offer an independent opinion of the political, economic, and cultural environment. Academic freedom, in return, would be attained by preparing the individual on a curriculum free from the influence of politics, culture, the economy, or religion. The model would need to operate relative to scientific interests rather than market-driven principles.

## **2.6 The University in the Twentieth Century**

During the twentieth century, the years leading up to the Second World War brought many changes to the society. Indeed, nations in Europe and North America were reeling from the effects of the First War and, as a result, were undergoing infrastructural, military, and political developments. However, the social setting after the Second World War revealed the need for social change. Of the different paths, the pursuit would follow, academic achievement was critical. Notably, the timing and scale of changes in the American higher education sector were influential in the global reform of higher education. Particularly, Wolter (2013) observes, these changes were significant for the massification of higher education.

An important aspect of these changes was women's education. The idea that a young, single woman would live at home with her parents until she married and moved into a home with her husband and started her own family began to fade, albeit slowly, and the idea of a single woman finishing high school and entering the workforce, living in her apartment, began to emerge as a possible reality. Along with this came the possibility that women would pursue academic studies at the university level. Before 1900, this had largely taken the form of nursing studies especially as evolved with changes in military demands. Also, women saw an opening in teaching following the unintended consequence of the Civil War (Egenes, 2017). So many men had had to join the Union and Confederate Armies that there were not enough qualified doctors to



treat the legions of wounded, and women entered the fray to fill the gap. An example of this was Mary Ann Bickerdyke, who volunteered to help after "witnessing suffering soldiers who had no one to care for them" (Weatherford, 2010). She was the only woman allowed to travel with the army of General William T. Sherman, serving as the only nurse for about two thousand men at the Battle of Lookout Mountain. After the Civil War, Egenes (2017) shows that women were recognized for their medical work on the battlefields leading to the rise of nursing schools.

As there became more and more needs for women to fill jobs in the early twentieth century, more education opportunities began to appear as well. After World War I, higher education began to expand significantly, but there was some conflict as to what a university course of study should include so that graduation would both prepare the student for the career world while also retaining the diverse background of the liberal education.

In the 1930s, the name for one paradigm had become "general education," which held to the idea that all university students should cover a common core of knowledge in their first two years on campus before moving on to an area of concentration in their last two. This generally dovetailed with the idea of the "liberal education," although a lack of uniformity meant that different institutions developed different interpretations of those contexts (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). Evidently, the writers add, there was opposition to two trends that still remain relevant to date. These are vocational and specialization.

Specialization referred to the pursuit of academic knowledge at the breakneck pace that modern technology made possible. This pursuit put pressure on educational administrators to reduce common core course loads to allow students to start leaving that common core of knowledge behind sooner and make more room in their degree plans for increased coursework in their areas of concentration. The support for this change came from the claim that there was little

knowledge in the common core from the first two years of college that a person would need during his or her career or in graduate study, so the advisability of requiring those courses seemed limited at best (Cohen, 1998). However, many universities in those days had administrations that considered the common core within a liberal education as essential to mastering and demonstrating advanced levels of knowledge, and so universities were looking for ways to add to their capacity to teach the liberal arts and sciences. This was the case even though, as of 1940, a little over a third of bachelor's degrees were conferred for the liberal arts and sciences, roughly equivalent to the number of degrees bestowed in business and education (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). So while the rhetoric of higher education was moving toward the liberal arts, the practice of the American student was moving toward professions and practical disciplines.

In the North American context, two significant reports were released after World War II that addressed these questions of curriculum as well as the characteristics of higher education and who should be eligible for admission to universities. One was the Harvard Red Book, entitled, *General Education in a Free Society*. That report focused both on the curriculum that the faculty at Harvard College would teach as well as what sort of intellectual underpinnings a democratic society such as the United States might require (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). The simple fact that the name “Harvard” adorned the cover of the report brought it a measure of instant credibility, but the report also echoed some of the concerns that were being raised against the notion of a purely liberal education. The postwar era was an important time in terms of national unity, and the Harvard Red Book urged a focus toward general education within the high school (instead of a push toward vocational specialization). Then, in the university years, the Harvard Red Book urged a focus on liberal education in the first two years as part of developing the sort of critical thinking skills that were necessary to engage successfully in specialized knowledge. So,

the basic arts and sciences would form much of the curriculum in the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree, followed by two years of specialization.

This was important because the Harvard Red Book took what had been seen as an elitist concept ("liberal education") and branded it as something everyone could use on the way toward advanced specialization. The approach was critical to the preparation of students to join colleges. As Hurtado (2003) observes, that is a platform that fosters the ideological ideals necessary for participation in a democratic society. As a result, just about every university in the United States set up a mandatory class focused on Western heritage, and then different universities crafted approaches to the liberal arts sequence.

A second report that came out during this period was the *President's Commission Higher Education for American Democracy*. This led to the formation of the Commission on Financing Higher Education, which covered the issue of paying for higher education but also other ideological issues that were also addressed in the Harvard Red Book. This report also bestowed a high priority on the ideas of general education and democracy but developed interpretations of those terms that differed significantly. This report concluded that education had as its basic purpose the inculcation of the ideals of democracy in all citizens so that society could elevate to an idyllic democracy. Concerning curriculum, this report promoted an idea of general education that goes back to John Dewey, in that all people who attend and graduate college should emerge with common coursework that avoids any sort of specialization or bent toward vocational ends (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). The purpose of this experience sounds like something more ideological than intellectual, with graduates emerging having gone through an adjustment process that would make them, socially and emotionally, better citizens, more attuned to the requirements of thriving within a family unit. To Vaughan (2018), while leaving college, the student would be

required to not only possess the ability to handle professional skills but also have a proper attitude. This commission also identified social mobility as a potential ill, indicating that education should teach the dignity that all people possess through whatever work they perform and use that dignity as a definition for equality, removing such distinctions as the one that existed between the symbolism of the white and the blue-collar, for example.

With the end of the Second World War came the implementation of mass manufacturing on a scale that made the rollout of the Model T pale in comparison. This was true about the tract houses that would form the Levittowns in the early postwar years. It also appeared in the institution of education, as state universities multiplied in the decades after the return of soldiers from the cataclysmic conflict. The 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act, known commonly as the G.I. Bill, meant that soldiers could come back home and earn a university degree in return for their contributions to the American military, and what this meant was that education would need to expand as well.

The late 1940s featured considerable turmoil in both the American economy as well as American politics. It is common to think of the tumult that erupted in the 1960s and 1970s, but the disorientation that broke out after the end of the Second World War was significant as well. The United States economy had to reabsorb all of the fighting men and women who had gone to fight the Germans and the Japanese, and the G.I. Bill provided for those soldiers to receive a college degree. Over the remainder of that decade, there was a significant debate about what universities should teach and who should attend those universities in the first place. It did not take much time for the quasi-Victorian ethos of American society to emerge in the early 1950s, in which a largely conservative sensibility emerged for the proper behavior of Americans. Conforming to the idea of the nuclear family, moving toward the starter home, white picket fence,

and children on a lawn, meaning that the ideal for many Americans included pursuing university studies, along with the growth of the middle class (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). As the 1950s became the 1960s, there was a response from those who had not already made it into the middle class, pushing liberal sensitivities but also increasing college sizes further.

One development that emerged during the early postwar period was the growth of public universities in urban environments, such as the University of South Florida, in Tampa, Florida. Many of the major state universities, historically, had been opened in towns that were not the largest cities in the state but instead allowed the university to serve as the hub, even in cases where the state capital hosted the state university and other cities grew to become the major markets for business and population (Kerr, 2001). Examples of this included Florida State University (in Tallahassee), the University of Alabama (in Tuscaloosa), and even the University of Texas (in Austin, the capital but not one of the largest cities in the state). The University of South Florida represented a shift in the attraction of students, realizing that many students would not be able to live the four-year on-campus lifestyle, moving from dormitories to fraternity or sorority houses. Instead, many students would commute to and from campus, either as part-time or full-time students, and were either in the midst of a career or were building one while also attending university classes (Garber, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). This opened the possibility of university education to many who had not conceived of the notion at the time they had graduated high school, either because of the economic realities of their situation or because of a desire to investigate career opportunities before moving onto college.

Another development in the postwar years that influenced the growth of college campuses was the creation of the modern honors program. Historically, honors programs in universities had recognized students based on their performance in their first two years on campus and allowed

them to move into the individual study under the supervision of a professor. The new paradigm that emerged began at the University of Colorado, where philosophy professor Joseph Cohen (1998) developed the idea of recognizing incoming freshmen. Cohen (1988) investigated funding sources from foundations and developed the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, or ICSS, to target incoming students who had the potential to attain “superior” status on campus and invite them into programs that would allow them to pursue learning at a higher level instead of getting lost in the masses of the growing state university campuses (Garber, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). That provided for a more intimate feel for those incoming students and provided competition for the private universities that targeted the more elite students but also charged significantly more in tuition and fees.

While the university experience that emerged in the first two decades of the postwar years in the United States largely made the university campus a conservative enclave, the events of the next decades turn that shift to the left. Many college campuses served as the site of rebellions protesting many different causes, whether it was the Vietnam War, the persisting injustices concerning civil rights that left so many people still underrepresented, a new wave of feminism, or other causes that led to "sit-ins" and other protests. Higher education took a shift from the conservative bellwether to a place where liberals could find support for their views and develop enclaves to keep that thinking going (Garber, Sorber & Anderson). There was a distinct antipathy among what would become known as "the New Left" when it came to such ideas as patriotism and middle-class values, and antipathy that remains, in many forms, in our own time, even as what was known as middle-class values in the 1960s and 1970s has shifted significantly.

One institution that formed the springboard for this expansion was the state teachers' college. There were about 200 in the United States when the war came to an end, but they were

re-branded and re-conceived as a state comprehensive colleges and regional universities (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). Even such future luminaries as President Lyndon Johnson took their university education at these institutions; Johnson attended Southwest Texas State Teachers College, which would become Texas State University (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). The changes that these schools underwent made them the predominant school of choice for many students who came from working-class families and were, in many cases the first generation in their families to have attended university.

Many of these teachers' colleges had begun as "normal schools," but when they re-branded as "state teachers colleges," they gained the right to confer bachelor's degrees. This became important because most states required teachers to have bachelor's degrees by the year 1950 (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). Samples from teachers' colleges that became state schools that many of their attendees were planning to enter professions but were working in trades. Many of these students descended from Eastern or Southern European families that had come to the United States during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, with Italian, Irish and German students also taking a significant interest. The vast majority of students who entered teachers' college (and the descendants of these institutions) had as their most frequently mentioned motivation the chance to serve in the profession of education (Geiger, Sorber, & Anderson, 2017). Many students also mentioned entering college for the chance to have a better professional and economic future than their parents had so that their children could then continue climbing the social ladder.

In the twenty-first century, such ideas as Newman's idyllic notion of the university sound wonderful, but they simply do not mirror the needs of modern society. When Newman was writing, a university education was something that only the elite members of society could even

conceive of the undertaking. Members of the lower classes were much more likely in Newman's time to fail even to finish the eighth grade, which was seen as the endpoint of public schooling unless one was moving on to university (Dorn, 2017). In rural areas, all of the children who were in school would learn in a single-room schoolhouse, with the youngest students at the front (McCarthy, 2016). The idea of having a physics lab for all students was not something that would have occurred to policy planners during that era, but modern public high schools feature laboratories for biology, physics, and chemistry, as well as specially designed rooms for theater performances and kilns to use for firing finished pieces in ceramics classrooms. So in some ways, the general vision that Newman had for education has been realized, but in the high school years, leaving perhaps an opening for greater specialization on the university campus.

In essence, it was during this period that the idea of education in general and university education in particular, was molded to something similar to what we see in the modern day. These changes, even though massive and sweeping, came in slowly and not in a uniform manner. For that reason, during the transition period, concurrent but different systems of education could be found.

## **2.7 The University Today and Beyond: The United States**

The US system is recognized as a top performer in the global higher education rankings of institutions. The historical causes of the superiority of U.S. universities in the international arena has been reinforced by important factors. For instance, U.S. universities have had government defense and commercial investment providing a very significant amount of resources for research and development (R&D) leading to the development of labs and centres of expertise. By leading in R&D, universities stimulated many fields benefiting the entire country economically and



scientifically (Audretsch et al., 2019). Another factor propelling the U.S. universities to the top of the rankings is the nationwide support for entrepreneurship. Multiple universities have well-developed entrepreneurship centers that support students and their start-up ideas by providing support, mentorship, and funding (Cunningham et al., 2019). From a long-term perspective, these initiatives reinforce creativity and business acumen, which improve the ties between universities, industries, and investors (Cunningham et al., 2019). This is a complex system that helps higher education in elite U.S. universities to retain their top rating. In addition, universities in the U.S. foster a strong connection among their alumni through mentorship and financial support. As a result, this aspect attracts more students domestically and internationally, which underlines the importance of social networking in higher education. Finally, the U.S. universities focus on the diversity and multiculturalism of their environment, which helps to attract more sponsors, students, international cooperations, and funding from the government.

The United States, while tracing its roots in European societies, owes its culture to the continent. As Pérez (2015) writes, the establishment of the colonies was marked by the demand for allegiance to the existing European monarchies. Granted, the migration to the land entailed political, religious, and academic culture. While centuries of social evolution have led to the refinement of the institutions, one has to appreciate the role played by the American setting in defining the global academic environment. As Mowery and Rosenberg (1999) add, not only has the U.S. contributed to scientific growth but, also, has highlighted the importance of long-term policy in transforming the sector.

Tracking the changes following the Second World War, the inclusivity of women, and the budgetary implications following the Cold War, one realizes a sector wrought in metamorphosis. Not only has gender inclusivity facilitated the utility of the two demographic divides but also

ensured homogenous contribution by the genders. It is worth noting that the U.S.' drive toward defense, following the military interests in science and the race to global superiority, has served in promoting innovation. With the current Ivy League system, Maringe (2010) writes, the country maintains its mark in global higher education.

The twenty-first century saw the emergence of the "civic university." This new ideal about what a university is supposed to be and represent, focused more on the needs of the students and the society, rather than the archaic pursuit of simply distributing knowledge in any way possible.

The UPP Foundation founded a Civic University Commission whose purpose was to perform research that would guide as to what a modern university is and how the modern civic university can serve the needs of its student base – as well as the surrounding geographical area responsible for providing much of the financial base for that institution through taxation. This commission found that there was a widespread lack of knowledge about the benefits that local civic universities bring to their surrounding neighborhoods, such as a large number of free lectures and other presentations available to the general public that most people outside the university campus did not know were even happening (UPP Foundation, 2018).

The Commission came up with several elements of a definition for a "civic" university. First came the idea that it should be public-centered in its focus (UPP Foundation, 2018). To the commission, this meant that area people would be able to speak about their local university with a sense of pride and consciousness of its contributions to the surrounding community. Also, a civic university should have connections with a large percentage of local area leaders, as well as people who live locally forming a considerable percentage of the leadership structure of the university. The purpose of these last two metrics was to ensure that the university might be more likely to undertake initiatives that bring local benefits.

Next, the Commission further specified what it meant by the university being “local” in nature. In their words, this means that the university must be “willing to accept that there are areas to which it does not have a special responsibility” and “that there are some people it prioritizes – in particular, those who grow up, live, and work in the area” (UPP Foundation, 2018). This might come across as somewhat vague; this could be seen as a shot across the bow against such ideas as affirmative action policies that help ensure that underrepresented minorities receive opportunities to attend quality universities. It could also refer to initiatives that might focus on bringing international students onto campus. It is hard to say how else a university could demonstrate a special sense of responsibility toward the people who live in the area without bringing up the question of admission, and there are many areas where universities do just that. For example, most public universities that are funded through state budgets in the United States offer a tuition discount to students who are residents of that state, as a courtesy for the funds that go from the state treasury to assist in the funding of those universities' programs, both over the short and long term.

Perhaps the most interesting phraseology in the Commission’s definition of the civic university as an autonomous and charitable institution. The report indicates that the writers “want to recognize that universities are autonomous and proudly claim that autonomy...A truly civic university will have a strategy, regardless, that is rooted in a clear and coherent view of the needs of its place” (UPP Foundation, 2018). So, there is, after all, a limit in the autonomy of the university, which apparently may have just enough freedom to ensure that it accomplishes the ends that its local government entities want it to.

As this tension builds over time, though, this could spell trouble for the idea of liberal arts education. One twentieth-century paradigm that had emerged was called the Wisconsin Idea, as it

was the University of Wisconsin that originated it, under the leadership of Charles Van Hise, who was the university president from 1903 until 1918. The basic premise of this idea was that the influence of a university should extend well beyond the edges of the university's campus. Instead, the professors and students should also take their technical expertise out into the wider community and even aid in the composition of legislation. Hise said in a 1905 speech, "I shall never be content until the beneficent influence of the University reaches every family of the state...If our beloved institution reaches this ideal it will be the first perfect state university" (Harris, 2018). The state's university system incorporated this concept into its mission statement, and Wisconsin's university system became a prototype for the possibilities that higher education institutions represented. According to that vision, the university could play a major role in transforming the entire state.

As he has with so many other of the grand ideas that emerged when progressive thinking held sway in Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker did his best to undermine Hise's concept. In 2015, Walker's budget proposal included a change in the Wisconsin Idea that would alter the focus on a "search for truth" to a focus on meeting "the state's workforce needs" (Harris, 2018). This might seem like a minor alteration, one that takes away an almost Star Trek-like idealism and replaces it with a phrase that sounds like it would help people on a practical level. At that time, there were still enough progressive minds in the state to balk at the change, objecting that such abstractions as truth and the public good were part of the unique social fabric in Wisconsin.

However, even though the university's mission statement remained the same, the University of Wisconsin's course offerings have taken the tack that soon-to-be-ex-Governor Walker intended. Last month, the university announced that it would no longer offer six majors in the liberal arts: history, German, French, geology, geography, 2D art, and 3D art (Harris, 2018).

When observers pointed out the benefit of remembering history, for example, the university administration responded that the most recent rounds of budget cuts had made maintaining those majors infeasible.

Between 2007 and 2018, there were significant budget cuts in state funding for public higher education in the US. For instance, Wisconsin's spending in 2017 was nearly 23% less than in 2007, adjusted for inflation (Mitchell, Leachman, Masterson & Waxman, 2018). Nationwide, state funding for public two- and four-year institutions in the 2017-18 school year was over \$7 billion below 2008 levels, after adjusting for inflation. These cuts were largely a response to the Great Recession of 2007-2008. As a result, colleges increased tuition, cut faculty (favoring part-time lecturers over full-time faculty), reduced course offerings, and consolidated or closed campuses. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that between 2008 and 2018, only four states (California, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Hawaii) increased higher education spending. The other 45 states decreased their spending, with an average reduction of 16% per student, and nine states cutting more than 30% (Mitchell et al., 2018).

The consequences of state budget cuts on students have been significant. Between 2008 and the 2017-18 school year, the average yearly tuition at four-year public colleges increased by 36%, with six states experiencing over a 60% rise (College Board, n.d.). This increase has made college less affordable, as states shift more costs to students. Despite the higher tuition bringing in some revenue, it hasn't fully covered the funding gaps, leading to reduced services. Given the Republican control of many state legislatures, reversing these funding priorities seems unlikely.

This situation raises the question of whether North American society can still afford the traditional university experience or if it will become exclusive to the elite, with the rest attending more affordable community colleges and urban, computer-based schools. This shift involves not

only affordability issues but also the nature of education, with increasing online coursework and social media communication reducing face-to-face interactions. The future of public universities thus involves complex considerations of funding, access, and the societal role of higher education.

In 2016, Facebook was implicated in allegations of interfering with the U.S. presidential elections, involving Cambridge Analytica, a company linked to the UK's Cambridge University (Liotsiou et al., 2020). This highlighted the significant global influence of universities. Top institutions like MIT, Stanford, Oxford, and Harvard attract elite talent and foster advancements in various fields. These universities play a crucial role in spreading ideas globally and embracing diversity, although some countries, like Saudi Arabia, will not adopt Western diversity standards.

The 20th century underscored the importance of creating educated societies for national development. The U.S., by welcoming intelligent migrants, has established itself as a premier international academic destination (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012). This approach has helped the U.S. build a robust professional pool. As other nations strive for similar academic prominence, the expansion of education is inevitable, leading to new strategic thinking influenced by the international reach and contributions of universities

The preceding discussion provides insights into the critical issues confronting universities in the United States. The following section turns to the discussion of United Kingdom universities, also recognized as among the highest performers in the global higher education arena. British universities have consistently maintained a distinguished reputation for academic excellence and innovation, contributing substantially to research advancements and intellectual discourse worldwide. Their commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environments underscores their pivotal role in shaping international education standards and nurturing talent across various disciplines.

## 2.8 University in the United Kingdom

The UK universities represent one of the most important higher education systems globally. They have continuously evolved to meet changing educational and societal needs, becoming increasingly diverse with a growing number of international students and a broader range of academic disciplines. Prestigious institutions such as the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, and the London School of Economics and Political Science exemplify the excellence of the British university system. This system has made profound contributions to academia, producing numerous influential thinkers, scientists, and scholars throughout history. The UK's commitment to adapting and expanding its educational offerings has cemented its status as a world-renowned hub for higher education and research. The impact of British universities extends far beyond their campuses, influencing global academic standards and fostering innovation across various fields (Benner et al., 2022).

The history of the British university system is a rich and diverse one, spanning several centuries and encompassing numerous notable institutions. History began with medieval universities. The British university system has its roots in the medieval period. The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world, with its origins dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Cobban, 1999). It was followed by the University of Cambridge, established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Cobban, 1999). These universities were initially founded as self-governing communities of scholars and played a crucial role in the intellectual and cultural life of medieval Europe.

The medieval British university system emerged during a period of intellectual and cultural revival in Europe. Here is a closer look at the history of medieval British universities,

with a focus on the two oldest institutions. The University of Oxford is considered the oldest university in the English-speaking world. It traces its origins back to the 12th century, although the exact date of its foundation is uncertain (Cobban, 1999). The university grew out of local schools and scholars who settled in Oxford, attracted by the intellectual atmosphere of the town (Brockliss, 2016). The University of Oxford developed as a self-governing community of scholars known as a "university." Initially, it consisted of groups of students and teachers who gathered around influential scholars and masters to study various subjects (Brockliss, 2016). The university focused primarily on the study of theology, canon law, and the liberal arts.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Oxford began to organize into separate colleges. These colleges were endowed institutions that provided lodging, supervision, and resources for students (Brockliss, 2016). They played a central role in shaping the academic and social life of the university. The first college, University College, was founded in 1249 (Brockliss, 2016). Oxford gained a reputation for its scholarly pursuits and intellectual achievements. The university attracted renowned scholars and thinkers, including Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, and John Wycliffe. Oxford became a centre of learning and debate, contributing significantly to the intellectual and cultural developments of the medieval period. The University of Cambridge was founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, following the pattern set by Oxford (Brockliss, 2016). It emerged when a group of scholars from Oxford migrated to Cambridge to escape conflict and establish their own community of learning.

Over time, a friendly rivalry developed between Oxford and Cambridge. The two universities competed for students, resources, and academic prestige. This rivalry spurred further development and expansion of both institutions (Benner et al., 2022). In the medieval period, the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge focused on the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and



the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) (Benner et al., 2022). Students pursued degrees in arts, and those who excelled could progress to higher degrees, such as a master's or doctorate. The study of theology was particularly prominent, reflecting the close connection between academia and the Church.

The medieval British university system, represented by Oxford and Cambridge, played a pivotal role in European scholarship during the Middle Ages. It fostered the development of critical thinking, scholarship, and religious studies. The universities produced influential scholars, theologians, and leaders who made significant contributions to various fields of knowledge. The medieval British university system laid the foundation for the modern higher education system in the United Kingdom. It established the traditions of collegiate organization, academic pursuit, and intellectual rigour that continue to shape British universities to this day.

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, the British university system experienced significant growth and transformation. New colleges were established within the universities, expanding their capacity to accommodate more students. The colleges, such as All Souls, Christ Church, and Trinity, became centres of scholarship and education (Feingold & Watts, 2019). This era also witnessed the establishment of additional universities in the United Kingdom, including the University of Edinburgh (1583) and the University of Glasgow (1451) (Feingold & Watts, 2019).

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, the British university system underwent significant developments and transformations. This era marked a time of intellectual and cultural growth, scientific advancements, and the spread of new ideas (Feingold & Watts, 2019). The Renaissance, which originated in Italy in the 14th century, brought a renewed interest

in classical learning, humanism, and the pursuit of knowledge. These ideas gradually spread to Britain, influencing the development of its universities.

During the Renaissance, the curriculum of British universities expanded beyond traditional theology and philosophy. The study of humanities, classical languages, literature, history, and natural sciences gained prominence (Feingold & Watts, 2019). This shift broadened the intellectual scope of universities and reflected the humanist ideals of the time. The invention of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century played a crucial role in disseminating knowledge and facilitating the exchange of ideas (Feingold & Watts, 2019). British universities benefited from this technological advancement as printed books became more accessible, leading to increased scholarly activity and the accumulation of knowledge.

The universities of Oxford and Cambridge remained at the forefront of intellectual pursuits during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. They attracted prominent scholars and educators who contributed to the growth and dissemination of knowledge. Notable figures associated with these universities during this period include Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, and Francis Bacon (Brockliss, 2016). The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods witnessed significant scientific advancements. British universities played a key role in fostering scientific inquiry and experimentation. Institutions like the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge were centres for the study of natural philosophy (the precursor to modern science) and made contributions to various scientific disciplines, including physics, astronomy, and medicine (Brockliss, 2016).

During the Enlightenment, specialized institutions emerged alongside traditional universities. For example, the Royal Society, founded in 1660, became an important centre for scientific research and scholarly discussions (Feingold & Watts, 2019). It played a crucial role in

promoting the scientific method and encouraging scientific collaboration among scholars. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, dissenting academies were established to provide education to nonconformist Protestant groups who were excluded from traditional universities due to religious differences (Feingold & Watts, 2019). These academies, such as the Warrington Academy and the New College at Hackney, offered a broader curriculum and contributed to the advancement of liberal education in Britain (Feingold & Watts, 2019).

The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods coincided with significant social and political changes in Britain. The Protestant Reformation, the English Civil War, and the Glorious Revolution shaped the intellectual climate and influenced university life. Universities played a role in training clergy, preparing individuals for political leadership, and serving as platforms for political and religious debates (Benner et al., 2022). The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods marked a transformative era for British universities. They expanded their curricula, embraced scientific inquiry, and became hubs of intellectual activity. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge continued to be at the forefront of academic scholarship and played a vital role in shaping the intellectual and cultural landscape of the time.

The changes were stimulated by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Reforms. The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a period of reforms and modernization within the British university system. The University of London was founded in 1836 as the first university in England to admit students regardless of their religious affiliations. It was also the first university to offer distance learning programs (Williams & Filippakou, 2010). The University of Durham (1832) and the University of Wales (1893) were also established during this period (Williams & Filippakou, 2010).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British university system witnessed significant expansion and specialization. New universities were founded, and existing institutions expanded their offerings.

The University of Birmingham (1900), the University of Manchester (2004, a merger of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and the Victoria University of Manchester), and the University of Warwick (1965) are among the universities that were established during this period (Williams & Filippakou, 2010). An important legislation that made a major change was the Higher Education Act (1992). The Higher Education Act (1992) brought about important changes to the structure of British universities. It abolished the binary system of universities and polytechnics, creating a unified system of higher education institutions. Polytechnics were granted university status, leading to the establishment of "new universities" (Williams & Filippakou, 2010). This act also introduced quality assurance measures and created funding councils to oversee higher education in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In recent years, the British university system has continued to evolve and adapt to changing educational and societal needs. It has become more diverse, with an increasing number of international students and a broader range of academic disciplines. The system includes prestigious institutions such as the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and many others (Benner et al., 2022). The British university system has had a profound impact on academia and has produced numerous influential thinkers, scientists, and scholars throughout its history. Today, it remains a world-renowned hub for higher education and research.

## **2.9 The University in Saudi Arabia**

Bringing the discussion to Saudi Arabia, the rise of Saudi Arabia as an economic power in the Middle East has been swift, as the country was only founded in 1932. At that time, poverty was widespread in the country, and the first education system consisted of just a dozen schools

with 700 students. However, the discovery of oil beneath Saudi Arabia in 1938 changed the situation dramatically in terms of the wealth of the country, and by 1950 were there 365 schools with more than 42,000 students enrolled (Simmons & Simmons, 1994).

At first, education was limited to boys because of the interpretation of Islamic law at that time, but King Saud asked for a new religious interpretation about the possibility of educating girls in 1959, and a year later, the first school for girls opened its doors in Riyadh (Al-Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). At present, elementary and secondary education in Saudi Arabia is free for all Saudis and non-Saudi students who live inside the country. At the university level, higher education was set up just for Saudi citizens, and students received stipends if they qualified for study at the university level. However, because of the relatively low literacy levels in Saudi Arabia (78.8 percent in 2003, for example), the number of people qualifying for university studies was relatively low (CIA, 2011).

Between 1957 and 1975, seven different universities opened their doors in Saudi Arabia: King Saud University (1957), Islamic University (1961), King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals (1963), King Abdul-Aziz University (1967), Um Al-Qura University (1967), Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University (1974) and King Faisal University (1975).

Name of University	Year of Establishment
King Saud University	1957
Islamic University	1961
King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals	1963
King Abdul-Aziz University	1967
Um Al-Qura University	1967
Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University	1974
King Faisal University	1975

In 1975, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education was established, with responsibility for administrating the seven universities. This ministry's specific charges included proposing the opening of future universities and authorizing the establishment of specific programs to dovetail with the needs of the country; communicating and coordinating among the universities and other agencies and ministries in the government concerning meeting the needs of the government through academic initiatives; and representing the Saudi government overseas in all cultural and educational affairs, through a network of educational and cultural offices located in 32 different countries (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to Washington D.C.). In the years since 1975, the university system has expanded considerably in Saudi Arabia, growing to 23 universities, 98 primary teacher's colleges, 37 colleges and institutes for health, 12 technical

colleges, and 33 private colleges and universities. All of the private colleges and universities opened after 2001 when the Saudi government expanded permission to private entities to open universities.

Despite the large number of institutions open to serve students in higher education in Saudi Arabia, approximately 70,000 Saudi students were studying at universities overseas in baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs, in large part due to the lack of qualified faculty members to teach at Saudi institutions. The vast majority of the students who have gone overseas are studying in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. As of 2011, there were only three other countries with more overseas students than Saudi Arabia: China, India, and South Korea. The Ministry of Higher Education provides scholarships to all students who qualify for overseas study; female students also qualify, but they must also have a mahram, or an immediate family member, accompanying them overseas – and that person can also qualify for studies overseas. Because of Saudi Arabia's relatively small population in comparison to the other nations atop this list, there is no country with more students studying abroad as a proportion of its overall population than Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education, n.d.).

As of 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education also began to issue scholarships to Saudi students to attend private universities within Saudi Arabia, because the tuition and fees for many of those universities were beyond the means of many of the aspiring students. The purpose behind this significant investment is a benefit for the economy (Alamri, 2011).

There are several stumbling blocks toward the development of more faculty in Saudi Arabia, which is the primary reason why so many students go overseas. One hindrance that has been identified is the byzantine bureaucracy, which is the Ministry of Higher Education. Due to inefficiency and red-tapeism in the bureaucratic system, the modernization of university education

in Saudi Arabia is halted. Many of the faculty who come to teach at universities in Saudi Arabia are from overseas, even though there is institutionalized discrimination concerning base salaries as well as incentives against international faculty members as opposed to Saudi faculty members. One example of this is the opportunity for publication in academic journals within Saudi Arabia, as international faculty members receive less consideration for their research than Saudi faculty members do. The possibility of applying for promotions within the university is more difficult for international faculty members as well (Alamri, 2011).

Another hindrance within the Saudi university system has to do with a limited number of degrees, particularly at the advanced level, which means that many students must go overseas to pursue those degree programs. Within Saudi Arabia, there are still advanced degree programs that are only open to men or women, and so students of the other gender must go overseas if they want to pursue that sort of program (Alamri, 2011).

Finally, there are elements within the educational environment in other countries that are not yet a part of the Saudi system. One of these is a delay in bringing educational opportunities online to the degree that they have been offered in other countries. Also, while the Ministry of Higher Education funds universities, access to research funding falls behind that in other countries, which is why many academic departments in Saudi universities do not host scientific conferences or publish scientific journals, placing them at an academic disadvantage to universities in other countries. Finally, there is a disparity in academic freedom within Saudi universities thanks to the impact of cultural and/or political motivations. There is an opportunity for academics in Saudi Arabia to push for research funding so that their scholarly pursuits can take place at a more competitive level internationally. There is also a lack of uniformity concerning international faculty members, as many of the deans that have come from other



countries to perform administration at Saudi universities continue to follow the systems in their own countries. This can lead to significant inconsistencies as far as academic protocols (Alamri, 2011). As more reform comes to the Saudi higher education system, the system will be able to satisfy the needs of the country's economy without having to subsidize international studies for the country's higher education students.

As the above discussion shows, while Saudi Arabia has a robust higher education system along with many expert faculties, the system is also plagued by a number of problems. As a result, a kind of brain drain is happening in the society, where the meritorious students are preferring other (mostly Western) nations for their higher education. This is certainly a problem scenario.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

The stability of a society is dependent on the ability to prepare the next generation. While the pursuit of personal agenda is essential, as a collective, it is imperative that the community possess means through which elaborate tasks, such as in science, mathematics, and philosophy can be realized. Indeed, it is an endeavor that calls for an investment of resources and social energy. Looking at the history of education, it emerges that the ancient period was largely rooted in religiosity. With the church assuming a central role in the process, it would take resistance to the status quo for new modes of thinking to be adopted.

Over the centuries, different academic models have been developed. Although the American setting has been critical to the evolution of the modern university, credit must be given to different advocates. Some called for the adoption of an approach free from the influence of religion, politics, or the economy. However, a notable is the development of the printing press

which altered the mode of communication. Coupled with Luther's advocacy for reforms in the church, it is imperative that the period led to a step towards nurturing independence of thought. One, however, cannot disregard the role the 20th-century wars played in fostering liberal education. The century not only saw government, albeit in the U.S. at first, sponsorship of education but also an increase in equality of opportunity for the genders.

Nevertheless, within the Saudi system, there are elements present in other countries absent in the Kingdom. Some of these are inclusive of challenges in publication, academic freedom, and uniformity of the faculty. Although the country boasts of a developed system, a vast majority of the Kingdom's students pursue their higher education overseas. While it is reflective of internal deficiencies, it is a fact deviating from Saudi's development of different institutions. Being an economic power, the citizens must have access to modern institutions of higher learning, The pursuit of education in other destinations serves as only a testament to the global disparities in the overall educational capacity.

## The Concept of Excellence in Higher Education

### 3.1 Introduction

The concept of "excellence" has been in circulation for a very long time and is widely used today in various industries; thus, today every business must strive for excellence in all the activities it engages in. The majority of the time, this term means an outstanding performance. When applied to higher education, the concept of excellence takes on a new meaning. Excellence is connected to several different concepts, including: the increased performance of institutions; higher reputation; better student and teacher performance; high student opinion of their institutions; and the goals set by institutions (Brusoni et al., 2016).

After being questioned by Ball (1985) "what the hell is quality?" several scholars have proposed numerous definitions of quality. However, despite the passage of time, academics are still working hard to find an answer to this question. Notwithstanding, according to some scholars, the idea of quality can neither be measured nor defined. Other scholars believe quality can only be perceived and cannot be described in words. thus, quality is a nebulous term (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015).

The idea of quality may be ambiguous, but it has been utilized in applied and theoretical studies (Ruben, 2007). Researchers have observed various practice methodologies and definitions regarding quality (Ruben, 2007). When determining what constitutes excellence in higher education, academics encounter several obstacles (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015). This chapter will provide an overview of the fundamental concepts and ways of thinking about quality and excellence in higher education and institutions of higher education.

Undoubtedly, academic excellence urges the ability to perform highly and achieve in educational activities. The ancient universities set their standards and could presume superior

regional performance due to their monopoly. Today quality education is seen more as the right of every person. Academic excellence and quality are achieved with performance and high achieving attainments. This chapter primarily describes the excellence of academic performance and elaborates on the quality of education in ancient universities. The discussion touches on processes formal and informal including both attitudes and a limited consideration of the educational background of the ancient universities. The content highlights the significance of the existence and influence of ancient universities. As an ancient saying goes, old is a bar of gold; therefore, ancient universities still have a standard in today's world.

The primary focus of this chapter is a consideration of the concept of excellence within the context of higher education. This will concentrate on modern or recent ways of thinking about the relationship between quality and higher education, as well as the significance of how this definition relates to ranking systems.

The concept of quality is much more significant than the concept of ranking educational institutions. Today institutions are ranked based on the combination of various factors, i.e., research excellence, expertise, specializations, admissions, internationalization, doctoral program vs. graduate degree program ratio, student-to-staff ratio, the ratio of Ph.D. faculty, endowment, a measure of funding, historical reputation and student's perceptions (Thakur, 2007). At the same time, quality is a bigger concept based on the four basic indicators, i.e., Student Support, administration quality, Instructional quality, and student performance. It emphasizes and includes the organization's policies, actions, and internal and external performance (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015).

This section touches on the concept of measurement of quality and highlights the historical development of formal quality systems. Universities, either ancient or elite in the

modern world, have been recognized as having potential to transform committed students. Quality education in universities develops students' leadership abilities, prepares them for the future, and helps them to combat unpredictable situations. The practical applications of the education provided by universities make them a valuable contributor to society and completes the purpose of quality education.

Higher educational institutions like universities are considered the centers for excellence in higher education, which can significantly impact society. Today the quality of higher education is understood as primarily leveraging the nation's growth and development in different aspects such as economic, cultural, and scientific progress. This chapter considers the significance of national development plans based on the quality of higher education. Quality education makes people less vulnerable in responding to change. It touches on the concepts of strength and resilience from the education provided to the students so that they can contribute better to critical situations. It can transfer human potential into human resources so that citizens can take advantage of it towards success (Kalligas, Chloe, Effie, & Vassilis, 2020).

Quality education and excellence in universities provides higher education to students, and the providers also become shaped by this process, they make changes rapidly and learn with their students. Every day is challenging for them. The capabilities of higher education recipients provide to them a potential foundation of benefit towards a better future. Access to quality education can change the environment and induce changes in society, making it more adapted to progress equivalent with other nations. Higher education can reduce the gap between the underdeveloped and developed nations. However, to move towards these higher education effects, it is necessary to focus on the excellence and quality of education provided by national systems of education (Kumar, Balvinder, & Passey., 2020).

The first section of this chapter highlights ancient and the elite education in the universities predating the modern world. The fruits of their endeavor underline the fundamental concern of making the universities capable of providing a sustained and upgraded level of education. There was less competition to compare the education system of that time; however, the more established the approach in the system became, the organization improved (Sharma, 2013).

Changes have occurred over the years where positive outcomes have been achieved in the education sector. Today universities are expected to offer quality education that meets societal needs. Therefore, despite periods of decline, teaching and administration staff have incorporated approaches that helped enhance the continuity of quality education. The discoveries of society have been effective in ensuring the needs of the people are addressed holistically. The basic role of providing quality education rest with providers: the staff, teachers, and the professors. The administration and other staff members other than professors are today essential in consistently providing quality education. The leadership and instructional capabilities of practitioners and the implementation of new theories on the system make them capable of improvement and enhancement.

The appropriate utilization of the workforce and the required material for effective teaching with a well-organized environment can create a learning atmosphere in institutions. In higher education, competent people must lead the organization if it is to create such a learning environment. Quality and excellence have greater significance in higher education because building a solid foundation is based upon quality. The urge to search for the truth and the freedom to pursue all ideas is served by such a foundation.

Such a foundation gives institutions an edge to open their minds and take advantage of all available instruments of education. It includes all the necessary aspects both theoretical and

practical. Higher education gives a context to enjoy the creativity and embracement of innovation. Technological innovations have made a significant impact on change within higher education. The concept of excellence in higher education has been influenced by technological change in the world. Online university learning programs have played a significant role in enhancing positive outcomes. Higher education has incorporated such programs to ensure access, allowing more individuals to acquire the perspectives offered by higher education.

Higher education institutions have also developed sustainable teaching, research, and operations (Blanco-Portela et al., 2018). These practices are vital in the improvement of education excellence in society. They can help promote social commitment by empowering social groups. Such empowerment can be achieved by incorporating new knowledge and skills into the students. However, higher education institutions must embrace the concept of excellence in their operations. Sustainable leaders involve the head of institutions in tracking the objectives of the institutions (Blanco-Portela et al., 2018). Such leaders can guide stakeholders towards the significant changes institutions of higher learning need to make.

However, the growth of higher education throughout history has been met with obstacles in the form of difficulties in managing societal requirements. Collaborative efforts are essential to ensuring the long-term viability of higher education. Higher education institutions can only function effectively if they work together because of financial constraints. Applying improvement theory to higher education, which includes pursuing excellence and quality, necessitates financial investment. The development of higher education depends on how policy meets the needs of the people and progressive challenges. Scholars are, today, expected to provide effective and safe solutions for achieving positive outcomes (Huther & Georg, 2018).

According to an analysis made by Gaebel et al. (2018), the educational sector in Europe went through a period of revolution and dynamic development. This period has significantly contributed to improving the quality of higher education. Universities in Europe have adopted many learning methodologies essential to enhancing research and learning results (Gaebel et al., 2018). The quality of instruction is understood as of the utmost importance and contributes to improved educational outcomes.

The idea of excellence in higher education is considered in this section, including the results of student learning. Increasing the quality of educational provision is one way to strengthen the achievement of "excellence." When it comes to improving the prospects for success in higher education, the historical context is informative. In the first part of this section, I shall talk about the greatness and splendor of the medieval era, beginning with the very first university established in Europe during the medieval period. In the second segment, we will consider prestigious universities from the early modern period all the way up to the current day. There is a close connection between the possibilities open to students following graduation from prestigious universities like Cambridge and Oxford in the United Kingdom.

The distinctions between the universities may vary depending on the reputation and programs offered in the institutions. Elite universities are likely to have distinct programs but may specialize in certain areas. The third section will consider massification and the dominance of concerns over quality. The different definitions of quality will be discussed based on excellence in higher education. The last section will summarize the research findings on the concept of excellence in higher education.



### 3.2 Excellence and Quality in the Ancient University

There are several definitions of education; however, the most important definition is education is the gateway towards the empowerment of the people and the development of the nation." With the passage of time, knowledge has evolved into a source of property. It has supplanted capital assets and labor productivity as the primary drivers of economic expansion, progress, and prosperity. The creation of knowledge requires the presence of network researchers.

This network of scholars assists universities and helps to create new knowledge easier (Kalligas, Chloe, Effie, & Vassilis, 2020). Plato founded the first higher educational institution in 387BC, also known as the University of Athens. Later on, the educational institutions, this institution converts into higher educational institutions. The excellence and quality of higher education have changed over time because of the prevailing needs and social change (Kumar, Balvinder, & Passey., 2020).

Ghonge et al. (2020) argued that medieval education was focused on religion. The religious teachings played a critical role in ensuring individuals embraced what was taught in the schools. However, excellence was a matter of concern required to ensure individuals practiced what was taught. The basic educational institutions in the medieval time were cathedrals and churches, which were the only source of education. These cathedrals were sponsored by local societies, church authorities, and civil authorities. These educational institutions get fame with the passage of time due to their quality education system. These educational get prestige and consider the only source of formal education.

The establishment of the first universities globally contributed to the development of educational foundations and approaches. They had difficulties conquering the hurdles that sprang from the people's opposition. According to Mense et al. (2018), education has traditionally been

considered a fundamental need for fulfilling one's responsibilities as a member of society. Because of this, the very first university had to work hard to improve the quality of education offered there. The growth of variety brought about by globalization is essential to the improvement of the quality of higher education (Mense et al., 2018).

New colleges have been established to foster good characteristics in their school systems. However, the established institutes somehow have a progressed system and better reputation, therefore sometimes preferable to the new ones. The creation of new school systems is a better idea to grow faster. Meanwhile, the ancient universities tried to apply the new concepts in the system, so they didn't have to suffer. Students in ancient universities feel more responsibility because of an established history in the region. Higher education in the universities demands an integrated approach to assessment. Improvement in practical and planning out of the box; therefore, such steps help to address many challenges in the universities.

*Before the 12<sup>th</sup> century---education period:* To begin, the educational system previous to the 12th century was not in the least bit well-organized. In addition to the cathedra, the monastic schools were the public's primary source of education. This kind of thing may be discovered out in the countryside. The many components of the school were once subdivided into internal and exterior divisions, with each group being responsible for a separate set of responsibilities. In the meanwhile, the lack of external schools in some monasteries led to the locals being unable to enter such monasteries, which in turn rendered those monasteries less appealing to the locals. The curriculum was unsatisfactory, resulting in those who wanted to pursue other pathways feeling uninspired.

*Fragmented higher education:* The monastic schools attempted to begin the education process with a distinct curriculum to attract the attention of the people; however, it did not go well

for any of the stakeholders involved, including the students, the instructors, or the ecclesiastical authorities (Almoaibed ,2020). Teachers that arrived from other nations were unable to teach in the community's language, which led to a number of challenges. The language did not feature the medium that was used to provide instructions. Mainly because the outsiders did not understand the set native language, it was also urged to converse in the original language when doing day-to-day activities such as looking for a meal or purchasing a textbook.

*12<sup>th</sup> century and medieval startup:* The first step toward rectifying the situation was taken in the 12th century by establishing medieval educational institutions. These institutions took the form of universities. People in previous ages, such as the 12th century through the 16th century, were known to place a significant amount of emphasis on the education they received at Cathedral schools and schools of rhetoric. The relevance of the cathedral notion of schools was discussed in writing by historians. The term “learning stadium” signifies the structure or planning of teaching and learning spaces in medieval universities. It relates to the physical and spatial organization of the University: arrangements which were often setup like stadium or arenas for learning. This structure allowed for such concepts of medieval universities as group learning and academic disputation. It was an attempt to stress the collective aspect of higher learning in the Medieval times when education was a shared affair to be discussed in public spaces, like in the ancient stadium (Cantoni & Yuchtman, 2018).

It is generally agreed that the Kingdom of England, now known as Italy, was the location where the first educational institutions in Western Europe were created to provide higher education. The idea of pursuing education beyond high school originated throughout the Middle Ages. The United States of America is a colonial nation. During their time as colonizers, they brought the idea of higher education, which later became widespread across the rest of the globe

like a plague. The presence of students from every area is required in higher education; thus, it has expanded beyond its traditional boundaries. The institutions of higher learning were involved in scientific research, artistic endeavors, and other sectors as well. The universities had no physical barriers, such as a campus or building, since they possessed an abstract understanding of education.

It is founded on the company of persons who have come together to educate and be taught. The fundamental function of these universities was to act as negotiating power. They were able to fight for their rights as universities developed further and more. Teachers and students with a high level of education who came from various nations to gain information began to arrive. Additionally, the heads of religious and other educational institutions found reasons to be pleased with the organizations. The level of competition in higher education was low, and as a result, students were able to learn a great deal more. The same can be said about preceding eras, such as the 15th to 16th centuries. During these ages, which occurred in the Medieval Era, individuals tried to seize the threads of higher education that were present in their cultures so that they might bring education to a level that was both of high quality and well structured.

### **3.3 Elite Universities in the Early Modern Period**

In the 19th century, the university's administration engaged an external examiner to establish a quality assurance system for the institution. This marked the beginning of the modern quality assurance system. In 1832, the University of Durham enlisted the help of Oxford University to determine whether or not Durham's university was up to snuff in terms of academic excellence (Hazeldine,2021). Later, higher education institutions began using internal and external examiners to ensure the institutions were good. Higher education institutes (HEIs) began

to emerge due to this development. For the last four decades, businesses have been using the ISO 9000 series of standards to unify industrial processes.

The early modern education in Europe began with an overview of Medieval education in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and ended with the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Education had become much more diverse during this time. Humanistic subjects and science are their research of them. Higher education became available to the general public from the elite also. In other words, the intellectual circle became wider than before. However, women faced struggles and difficulties getting a place in this system. Education came to the public in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continued to tie with religion. People started to study higher education with science and religion.

Accreditation is done with the goal of higher education institutions being more accountable to the public and improving the academic quality of their programs. Accreditation, on the other hand, is a quality assurance method for higher education based on both self and peer assessment and adheres to certain norms and criteria. In the late 1800s, several accrediting bodies were founded that focused on educational standards and admissions processes, including RICS, IET, UK (1871); UK (1868); MSACS, USA (1887); NEASC, USA (1885) to mention a few. In subsequent years, several regulatory and legislative authorities, along with international conventions and agreements and accrediting bodies, were established.

The recent decade is the witness of the revolution of early modern higher education institutions. The early modern universities provided the receptivity to scientific ideas and contributed to critical dialogues. It became a hub of intellectual centers, a new world of innovative thoughts. However, the existence of the sustained higher education system is based upon the humanistically designed curriculum and well-rounded culture of erudition. The

practitioners considered the significance of the course, and its volume affected the natural philosophers and increasingly modified the science (Vine, 1976).

In the last two decades, Oxford and Cambridge have taken more than their entrants from state schools (Bolton, 2016). International students will likely opt for universities to enhance their knowledge and skills. Bolton (2016) argued that the historical data has shown the progress of university admission. Historical growth has played a significant role in enhancing positive outcomes toward the quality of education. The long history of elite universities provides a framework where students strive to join the universities. Therefore, the management team must embrace approaches that help in enhancing the continuity of quality education. However, the reputation of the universities must be maintained through the improvement of excellence in higher education.

Kromydas (2017) argued that higher education institutions and policy dynamics differ in different locations. Time is also a concern that may affect the execution of approaches that affect the education perspectives. However, higher education institutions must be involved in making policy frameworks. The University of Bologna was the first university in Europe to introduce "academic freedom" (Kromydas, 2017). The concept of excellence in higher education has improved from the inception of the first university. The present education perspectives must be based on facts and positive aspects affecting society. The introduction of liberal arts in the US helped transform universities towards improving quality education (Kromydas, 2017). Therefore, environmental changes played a significant role in the transformation of higher education.

Humboldtian University was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to pursue knowledge and disseminate it to society (Kromydas, 2017). The university's objective has played a significant

role in the formulation of a framework for quality education. The differences in culture, economic, and social systems create differences in what universities offer (Kromydas, 2017).

According to Huther & Georg (2018), German universities act as the quality model for higher educational institutions. However, significant developments have occurred in the seven decades since the rebirth of German institutions of higher learning in the aftermath of Hitler's defeat in 1945. Following World War II, the teaching profession in Germany was de-Nazified, and a normal university model was reestablished; however, both of these initiatives were put to the test and under pressure by the student revolt that occurred in the late 1960s. In the latter half of the 1990s, reforms were inconsistent and inconsistently implemented before entering what seems to be a permanent reform phase. During that 7 decades, the German higher educational system faces certain pressure to change the educational system from mass education to an elite education system. However, they face certain challenges, like a decrease in student and staff ratio, research problems, and research publications' capacity. However, after a recent evaluation, German higher education has introduced the higher quality system of education or elite educational system.

These elite universities have the strategic framework and significant environment for incorporating social changes. These frameworks of elite universities are more effective in bringing a good change in the quality of higher educational institutions. According to Kromydas (2017), better education in western cultures contributes to the advancement of social transformation. The change may need theories that engage the intellectual characteristics of the people.

In addition, higher education institutions also assist students in becoming more self-sufficient and making progress toward intellectual growth. The students will be able to improve

their knowledge, skills, and capabilities in their required fields with the assistance of this empowerment and intellectual development, which will enable them to have a successful career. According to Kromydas (2017), in addition to the United States, Chania, and Singapore, several other nations emphasize higher education quality. Because of this, these nations are putting a significant amount of money into their higher education systems. The investment may play an important role in ensuring that the requirements of the institutions are met. They are also making investments for solving the issues faced in the transmission of information and in the process of creating policy about higher education.

Universities underwent a significant transformation in the 19th and 20th centuries as an increasing number of people attended Enlightenment institutions. Following World War II in 1945, a growing number of people in both the United States and Germany started enrolling in higher education programs at already established institutions. This, in turn, led to the development of new options for individuals to pursue higher education. Higher educational institutions are increasingly focusing on science and technology in creating new types of universities. The transition from an educational institution modeled after those found in medieval times to one that places a greater emphasis on the production of new knowledge is meant by the phrase "research university (Carpentier, 2017)."

## **Employment**

Graduates from elite universities are expected to perform well when employed; thus, they are highly competitive. Zimmerman (2019) stated that 10% of publicly traded firms in the US are likely to have managers who studied in Harvard. Therefore, graduates from universities are likely to acquire employment from different firms. Talented students are equipped with skills, abilities, and knowledge vital to achieving positive outcomes after higher education. Elite degree programs



have a history of over 40 years; thus, they have a rich history (Zimmerman, 2019). The management team understands the different perspectives vital for enhancing the required approaches. The universities prepare the students to handle the situation after completing school.

Zimmerman (2019) found that elite universities provide a pathway to the top position, leading to good earnings. The top position in employment may play a critical role in ensuring individuals have good resources. The universities are expected to embrace aspects that may help enhance excellence in higher education. Elite education help students reach income levels by improving the quality of education (Zimmerman, 2019). The students must encourage each other to embrace the positive aspects of higher education. Therefore, university peers are likely to embrace approaches that may help the adoption of degree programs. The elite university may also contribute toward economic development by enhancing educational approaches.

Nevertheless, employers are likely to employ graduates with the relevant skills and knowledge required at the workplace. Taras et al. (2020) suggested that better universities attract better students who may perform well during employment. The universities are likely to have effective resources in equipping the students with the necessary skills. Universities ranked in the Webometrics are likely to produce graduates with competencies such as leadership, cooperation, creativity, and language proficiency (Taras et al., 2020). The competencies may help the graduates acquire employment because of the notion created in society. However, some of these conditions may vary depending on individual characteristics. Employers are expected to embrace the graduates and train them in the necessary skills in society.

Additionally, elite universities in the modern day are expected to incorporate excellence in higher education towards meeting societal demands. Graduates from top universities perform better because the university selects students from a large pool of students (Taras et al., 2020).

Therefore, the university management may choose the best students based on performance and regional background. Taras et al. (2020) found that students from the university perform well in the cognitive tests because of their past experiences in the previous school. The top universities must embrace approaches that help promote the quality of education. An individual's background may play a critical role in enhancing positive outcomes in educational settings. The continuity of education may be achieved where the students have equipped skills necessary for employment.

The idea of excelling in one's field of study when pursuing higher education may play a significant part in the process of increasing one's rewards while working. According to the findings of Taras et al. (2020), students attending famous colleges have a low level of self-regulation. When it comes to providing workers with the appropriate framework for expanding their educational horizons, modesty may be a factor that plays a crucial role. It is expected that graduates from the top 10 American institutions will earn a salary of \$72160 per year on average (Taras et al., 2020). The high compensation may be a result of the outstanding performance and other favorable qualities of the job. It is possible that the workers have a favorable impression of graduates from prestigious institutions, and as a result, such graduates may get higher pay. In-house training is a responsibility that falls on the shoulders of managers of human resources, who are responsible for implementing various solutions to address the issue.

### **Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance in university must be enhanced to ensure the knowledge and skills are directed to people's needs. The university's knowledge and skills must be enhanced by ensuring the information is effective. However, continuous education must be assured through the learning process in the university. The quality of higher education is determined by various indicators, including administrative, student support, instructional, and student performance (Schindler et al.,

2015). These indicators may play a critical role in improving students' expectations in managing quality assurance. The administration must enhance instructions that will support students to improve their performance. However, the teaching staff plays a critical role in improving the continuity of quality education.

Niedermeier (2017) suggested that the concept of quality assurance in higher education emerged in the 1980s. The teaching professionals are expected to maintain the ethos that helps ensure the institutions' objectives are met. Traditionally, the state steered quality assurance in higher education institutions (Niedermeier, 2017). The national standards were vital to ensuring the learning institutions meet the learner's objectives. New quality assurance standards were first experienced in the USA, where the public financed the higher education institutions (Niedermeier, 2017). The author argued that France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands incorporated policies to enhance quality assurance. These were critical aspects that helped improve positive outcomes in the educational sector. The policies are incorporated during the improvement of quality education for the students.

Quality assurance involves processes and policies to ensure quality improvement and maintenance (Schindler et al., 2015). Higher education institutions have a framework that helps to enhance quality education. The stakeholders are involved in enhancing approaches that promote positive outcomes. Accountability and continuous improvement are also enhanced towards achieving quality assurance (Schindler et al., 2015). Evaluation and monitoring strengthen the continuity of quality education in the university. However, challenges are likely to be experienced because of the challenges in managing the continuity of education. Quality assurance is done through the improvement of the educational aspects and addressing the challenges. Therefore, the administration embraces approaches that may help enhance positive outcomes. Most of the

teaching staff at top universities are more competent and strive to add more quality to their work in accordance with the level of higher educational institutions in their country and worldwide norms. They found more effective ways to engage their kids so that they could give them a high-quality education.

These institutes of higher education have also adopted a collaborative structure to deliver great education inside their institutions. In addition, they increase their students' overall performance by making improvements to the accountability system they use. Incorporating constructive components to enhance the ongoing quality of the educational system is often part of the responsibility that comes with being accountable. Higher education institutions improve their level of service to students by providing them with emotional support and a forum in which they may voice their opinions. As a result, those in positions of student leadership at the institution are obligated to respond to the concerns voiced by their fellow students (Newfield, 2018).

### **3.4 Historical development of the Formal Quality System**

Since the 1970s through the 1980s, the quality of higher education institutions has been seen as an evolutionary phase. Scholars began asking questions in 1985 about the quality of higher education institutions and if standards based on the ranking of these institutions can be developed (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015). However, this question remains unanswered. Gulden et al. (2020) argued that the concept of quality has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of the coordination of the education system. The management of higher education is responsible for improving the quality of education. Therefore, the teaching staff must work towards achieving the organizational missions and objectives. The objectives may help

improve the educational approaches by incorporating innovative approaches. The teaching staff should provide academic excellence through academic freedom (Gulden et al., 2020).

Education underwent radical change throughout the decade of the 1970s, as previously stated. The system's effectiveness has been enhanced, and it has started to take advantage of opportunities created by fake attempts. Since the 1970s, there has been a persistent effort to expand both the institutions' size and their development rate. In the first seven years of the 1960s, there was a lot of discussion on how education might improve numerically. In these years, there was a 4.7 percent increase in the overall enrollment numbers for the educational sector.

On the other hand, many more people join up for the primary classes than those that follow later. The number of enrolled female students virtually reached new highs and climbed at a much quicker rate than in the past. Female students make up 43% of the student body. The progression of time shows how the formal quality control system in education has developed historically. (Carpentier, 2017).

The quality emerged throughout the course of time. The historical viewpoint connected to the education department led to the education in any other case; in other words, think of them as homeschoolers. People used to acquire a building, very immediately place some children there as students, and then serve as unpaid teachers in the classroom. It had people from the community, parents, and workers from unions. The schools have evolved into the most populous location due to the rising number of students, and they now serve as a destination for those enrolled in higher education. These schools targeted students from the working class; however, they did not teach the virtues associated with the middle class. Students may study anything they pleased since there was no set schedule or curriculum. The concept of educational freedom was quickly put to rest due to the scheduled school hours that are dedicated to the open school system. The subject

provides information on the historical aspects of the education secretary's connection to the system.

The school system at that time was against corporal punishment and the governor encouraged the students' cognitive ability. The rote learnings were oppressive, and many conventional schools were gone after that mindset. The system of establishing free schooling was quite common. The teachers used to be known as workers but teach the students how to withstand lessons because the difficulties and the ease of lessons put the students' moods. From the historical perspective, teachers were responsible and struggling; they conveyed their messages to the student in the most respectable ways (Castella, 2014).

The development of a formal system happens over time, the learning system, exams, and the analytical tests of the candidates. The students and teachers are used to it now. However, it was not as easy as today. In the twentieth century, education was not as difficult as described, but it was going on in some parts of the world. The effects of the education system directly govern the impact on the country's economic, social, and political characteristics. The difficult model is used to explain the system's difficulties, and the consequences for the population with educational perspectives are described below.

In the same way, the education system in the 1970s impacted the education system. The post-war expansion of this education system leaves cross-national differences. The immense estimation of the global and regional level of schooling and literacy brought great efforts.

The quality of education is considered a leading challenge in a higher education institution. Seyfried & Pohlenz (2018) argued that higher education is concerned with bringing transparency in educational activities to ensure high-quality education. Furthermore, higher education organizations are also concerned about adopting modern means of education and

innovative educational technology to ensure high-quality education for the student. Hence it is identified that the quality of education has improved to a greater extent.

The innovative educational technology and techniques are quite effective in raising the level of education and developing student interest in education. As a result, due to the increase in students' interest, the educational institute's management emphasizes the educational process to satisfy the students' concerns (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Li & Xue (2022) mentioned in their research that by encountering the impact of education on stakeholders, the educational institutions are consistently developing policies to ensure educational stakeholders' satisfaction. As a result, educational organizations consider quality assurance and develop an educational system that ensures high-quality education.

All the educational institutes, including private and public, are making efforts to provide a high-quality environment for students to study. By considering quality assurance a greater challenge, the educational institute can provide the students with quality education. Li & Xue (2022) are argued that the educational organization considers quality assurance essential in educational decisions and policies. As a result, these organizations are successfully providing high-quality education to students.

According to Ahmed & Ashraf (2022), quality has become a concern of private and educational institutions after the second world war. They start more focus on the quality of their educational system. International higher education institutions focus on the quality assurance system in higher educational institutions. Students started focusing more on the name of educational institutions based on their quality educational system. Different Higher educational institutions in Europ Introduce Quality assurance systems regarding education and set the

standard. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many higher education institutions started the paper publication process to improve the educational performance of their students and teachers.

They set a Quality Assurance system to ensure the high quality of the educational system. The American Society has defined Quality Assurance for Quality (ASQ) as "the planned and systematic activities implemented within the quality system that can be demonstrated to provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill requirements for quality" (ASQ 2017). However, the concept of quality remains complex and hard to define because it is a complex and multidimensional concept. Prior research has defined different research approaches, i.e., teachers' satisfaction, students satisfaction and performance, and the number of publications issued by the university.

The improvement in the concept of quality in higher educational institutions diverts the focus of the government. They started to influence the educational system of a country. They started focusing on improving the technological system in their educational system, improving the education system of their country, and making the future of their country brighter.

Gulden et al. (2020) stated that competition in education and labor markets affects the provision of quality education. Governments also establish specific higher educational institutions for their respective countries.

These higher educational institutions set the quality standard for the performance of these educational institutions. Higher education has the role of developing quality education toward achieving the intended results in society (Cudney et al., 2017). Cudney et al. (2017) claimed that students are not the consumers but citizens of the institution. They may play a vital role in increasing quality education by involvement throughout the execution of different activities. The



historical method of establishing great education must engage the students who participate in improving the education process.

An issue with education quality in Poland arose early in the 20th century when the number of students getting decatenated grew. This was when there was an increase in the number of people who got interested in obtaining higher education and started getting interested in being admitted to the universities. This was when there was an increase in the number of people interested in obtaining higher education. They began investing in their studies. They were interested in obtaining information about the top institutions and ultimately decided to attend the institution with the highest renown. Two parties were involved at this time, one of which was the students who wanted to know whether or not they had made the right choice. The second group of stakeholders consisted of employers since they are interested in hiring individuals who have received their degrees from prestigious universities. The universities are aware of this situation and have declared that they will affirm their best performance with the assistance of the development of a consortium with the other institutions. They use a variety of strategies, such as "demand," which they formalize to varying degrees, develop "supply" in the form of rankings, and give birth to organizations that evaluate the education quality and validity of new offers. These strategies were used to establish competition in the industry, leading them to establish a ranking system to measure excellence (Rock, 2021).

### **3.5 Measuring Excellence**

Teaching excellence in higher education began to be emphasized in the late 20th century, with indicators used to enhance quality education (Loukkola et al., 2020). Developments in the education sector have further strengthened teaching aspects, with quantitative indicators playing a

significant role in improving quality goals (Loukkola et al., 2020). Evaluations often focus on the performance of students, which is a critical aspect of achieving positive outcomes. Teaching staff may also be involved in the evaluation process through self-assessment, which ensures quality education is maintained.

Quality indicators in the education sector are crucial for assessing excellence. Participants in evaluations outline necessary actions, and external quality assurance organizations provide examples of how these indicators should be utilized (Loukkola et al., 2020). Many quality metrics are aimed at enhancing the assessment of excellence in higher education. For instance, the employment rate of graduates is a key indicator, reflecting the impact of a university education. Graduates are expected to adopt strategies that support improved outcomes. Financial resources are also essential for initiatives aimed at enhancing high-quality education (Loukkola et al., 2020).

However, measuring excellence faces challenges in the education sector. Different approaches to excellence and issues like funding and evaluation difficulties can impact the process. Loukkola et al. (2020) suggested that student satisfaction could be an indicator of quality education, though it varies based on student expectations. Insufficient funding in higher education institutions complicates the measurement of excellence.

Despite these challenges, universities are expected to provide quality education to enhance students' knowledge and skills. Measuring excellence can also help in ranking universities, offering students a platform to choose institutions based on quality indicators.

### 3.6 Massification and the Dominance of Quality

Quality in education can be defined by identifying specific indicators that reflect desired outcomes, with the definition varying depending on individual activities and expectations (Schindler et al., 2015). For example, students anticipate future employment, whereas employers look for graduates' competencies (Niedermeier, 2017). Quality assurance involves structured, systematic, and continuous improvement and maintenance (Kis, 2005). According to Kis (2005), quality encompasses exception, fitness for purpose, transformation, and perfection, requiring lecturers to focus on the positive aspects of the learning process to meet objectives. High standards are essential for achieving excellence in the learning framework.

Quality can be assessed through accreditation, assessment, and audit (Kis, 2005). Accreditation ensures that quality assurance aspects are met, while evaluations must align with the public's educational expectations. Internal audits can identify opportunities for university improvement and highlight challenges, prompting appropriate strategies (Vykydal et al., 2020).

Quality in higher education is about fitness for purpose, addressing both educational and research needs (Niedermeier, 2017). Dominance of quality ensures universities meet educational objectives and missions. Higher education quality involves transforming learners, necessitating internal quality management models to maintain transformation continuity. Transparency in these models is crucial for stakeholder involvement in changes.

Niedermeier (2017) suggests quality can be viewed across five dimensions: input, process, output, impact, and outcomes, which are continuous processes in higher education. A conducive environment that fosters knowledge development is essential for students, with environmental conditions playing a significant role in determining the quality of education.

Bozzoli (2015) argued that universities should be afforded freedom of expression, scholarship, creativity, and research, as these attributes are critical for enhancing educational quality. Following 1994, the South African government aimed to play a pivotal role in improving university education through supportive transformative policies. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was established to investigate and correct system quality lapses without compromising institutional independence. Universities must be accountable for actions that improve higher education excellence and meet students' educational needs.

The gradual development of quality education relies on a collaborative framework involving various stakeholders. The HEQC strengthened university evaluation systems, enhancing quality education through robust evaluation mechanisms (Bozzoli, 2015). Addressing flaws in these mechanisms and assessing students to understand the impact of learning processes are essential steps. The National Qualifications Framework sets minimum standards for university courses, ensuring quality dominance in educational programs (Bozzoli, 2015).

Bertolin (2016) suggested that quality interpretation in higher education is influenced by beliefs, traditions, and values. This interpretation helps achieve quality assurance mechanisms. People's ideology, shaped by social consciousness, plays a role in interpreting objective reality. Quality in higher education can also be influenced by power struggles. Bertolin (2016) argued that financing policies are crucial for improving the quality of higher education, as they provide necessary resources to enhance educational standards.

In 1986, the World Bank advocated for investment in basic education to improve higher education quality (Bertolin, 2016). This investment aimed to ensure quality and excellence in learning institutions. The expansion of higher education institutions contributed to quality improvement, with financing and management reforms playing a significant role (Bertolin, 2016).

Government involvement in management and adherence to procedures is necessary, though institutions must be ready to incorporate changes from government agencies.

Collaborative initiatives are essential for enhancing quality education. Administrative authorities need to establish communication channels to ensure the dominance of quality in higher education. Effective communication is crucial for achieving this dominance.

Global exposure demands interventions to enhance education quality at universities. Institutional administrations must ensure students have access to information, creating a platform where quality education is essential. Quality education significantly enhances positive societal outcomes. Political factors have notably improved quality education in higher education (Filippakou, 2017). Regulation effectively enhances quality aspects. Filippakou (2017) noted that England has one of Europe's best mature quality systems, especially in undergraduate education. Thus, the dominance of quality helps universities improve information dissemination.

Individual countries are responsible for enhancing quality dominance. The European Union and Bologna Process play roles in developing global quality education, which should be bolstered by national strategies. Developing a quality education agenda requires school-level arrangements and government support. External examiners in UK higher education improve quality assurance by ensuring graduates meet required standards (Filippakou, 2017). Teaching staff must adopt approaches that offer quality education, leading to better student performance. National quality assurance, driven by external examiner expectations, is integral to learning.

In the early 1990s, quality became a political currency in the UK for improving education. Political interventions established a policy framework for tracking quality in higher education institutions. The abolition of the binary line between polytechnics and universities in 1992 was

vital for advancing the quality agenda. Post-political struggles, state involvement strengthens education quality in universities (Filippakou, 2017).

### **3.7 The Category of World Class University**

The concept of a "World-class university" represents productivity and teaching quality (Alharbi, 2016). Universities striving for this status must implement strategies that enhance productivity, knowledge dissemination, research, and contributions to cultural and civic life. Addressing cultural and social aspects holistically provides solutions beneficial to society. Excellence in education, driven by efficient resource utilization, such as university libraries, helps tackle societal issues (Alharbi, 2016).

The pursuit of becoming a World-class university has led to improved education quality through evidence-based approaches. Institutions aiming for top rankings must meet international standards, a goal pursued by administrators in recent years (Tayeb, 2016). Effective strategies are essential for achieving educational excellence. For instance, King Abdulaziz University (KAU) has adopted methods to meet World-class university standards, including high rankings, program accreditation, and quality education improvements (Tayeb, 2016). Both teaching staff and administration must be aware of these changes to achieve the required standards.

Additionally, a World-class university enhances societal welfare through capacity building, improving its global reputation (Alharbi, 2016). Globalization in universities ensures local solutions align with global expectations. Key characteristics of World-class universities include abundant resources, favorable government policies, and a concentration of talent (Alharbi, 2016). Government support and policies play a crucial role in providing education, while lecturers focus on nurturing talent for knowledge provision.

World-class universities must have abundant resources to support their stakeholders, despite high running costs (Alharbi, 2016). They should adopt strategies for securing funding, including maintaining good relationships with private and public financial supporters. Effective governance, as seen at Oxford and Harvard, includes regulated autonomy and a shared framework among students, leaders, faculty, and academics, promoting a strategic vision for quality education. Saudi universities should also embrace international accreditation standards to improve education quality (Alharbi, 2016).

Accountability and independence are crucial for enhancing university services and achieving the "world-class" concept, potentially boosting rankings and funding. Universities must establish a proper framework for accountability and independence, which is essential for improving education quality. However, integrating sustainability into operations and structures remains a challenge (Blanco-Portela et al., 2018). Leadership should improve communication channels to address these challenges effectively.

Developmental strategies are key to attaining the "world-class university" status. Such universities should create and disseminate knowledge, serve national needs, deliver quality education, and promote international public interest. Administrators must understand current global needs and adopt strategies to meet these needs. A world-class university attracts academically able students and qualified teaching staff, enhancing the quality and excellence of education (Tayeb, 2016).

Economic, social, and technological factors significantly impact the globalization process, influencing the concept of excellence in higher education, where graduates are expected to address societal problems. Advanced information technology introduces new dimensions in higher education financing, commercialization, and student mobility (Niedermeier, 2017).

Institutions aiming for "world-class university" status must adapt to these changes, particularly in technology, to provide relevant knowledge and skills. Ensuring quality assurance mechanisms are in place is essential to equip students with the necessary skills.

Higher education institutions should adopt strategies that promote quality education. According to Niedermeier (2017), learning institutions should transition from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, which involves continuously integrating new ideas. Lecturers should foster an environment conducive to learning. Policies and systems are crucial for maintaining and enhancing education quality (Niedermeier, 2017). Quality management plays a vital role in helping learners grasp the impact of educational methods. Quality control ensures that outcomes meet specified expectations, which is necessary for advancing research and student training. Both learners and educators need to implement approaches that effectively manage these processes.

### **3.8 Higher Education in Saudi Arabia**

University education began in 1957, and by 1982, the education system had grown to seven universities with 63563 students (Saleh, 1986). The drastic growth was effective in enhancing positive outcomes in society. The history of higher education in Saudi Arabia can be traced back to the Islam advent about 1400 years ago (Saleh, 1986). The Muslims embraced the importance of knowledge being disseminated to the world. Therefore, the advent of higher education effectively enhanced positive outcomes in society. Students began to flock to Mecca and Medina, where the school was sponsored by the wealthy Muslim community (Saleh, 1986). This indicates that religion played a significant role in enhancing the development of higher education. The incorporation of religion played a critical role in encouraging the people to



embrace education in learning institutions. Kuta's was offered till the late 20th century when modern schools were developed (Saleh, 1986).

Nevertheless, quality has been developed over the years towards the improvement of higher education in Saudi Arabia. The government may be involved in ensuring the continuity of quality learning in the institution of higher learning. The government's involvement may help formulate aspects that may help enhance the concept of excellence. Saudi universities are embracing ranking systems (Smith & Abdulrahman, 2013). The ranking systems are helping in improving the marketing aspects through the improvement of perceptions. Individuals are likely to join top-ranked universities in the international systems.

Quality in the education sector is vital because it can help individuals escape poverty and enhance holistic growth (Allam, 2020). Therefore, it should be improved by incorporating approaches that may help promote excellence in the training. The educational administrators and stakeholders must involve the students in ensuring quality education are provided in the institutions. The Saudi Arabian government is striving to provide quality education (Allam, 2020). The government's involvement may play a critical role in ensuring high education institutions provide the required information. However, the institutions must provide the required information despite the dynamics of the environmental challenges. The government may overcome the challenges by incorporating policies that will help enhance the education institutions.

The Ministry of education in Saudi Arabia reported an 86% expansion of universities between 2006-2016 (Hamdan et al., 2020). The expansion of the institutions may play a critical role in enhancing education among the people. The government's involvement may help enhance the resources required to manage the educational centers. The expansion of higher education in

Saudi Arabia has consistently increased the number of high school graduates (Hamdan et al., 2020). The universities may help bridge the gap in employment by providing skills and knowledge to the people. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established a vision 2030 policy program to address global needs (Hamdan et al., 2020). Therefore, the institution must be involved in ensuring the quality of education meets societal needs.

Additionally, local quality assurance agencies in Saudi Arabia may help improve education quality. In 2004, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAA) was established to improve the quality and excellence of higher education in Saudi Arabia (Allam, 2020). The commission may evaluate the institution to ensure the teachings are based on international standards. The institutions may be required to embrace policies and standards that may help promote the quality of education. NCAA is considered a think tank for higher education in areas like planning, policymaking, and setting rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education (Allam, 2020). The regulations may play a critical role in binding the administrators to provide quality education. However, the institutions must be equipped with approaches that may help achieve the desired outcomes.

The quality of higher education may be affected by learning and institutional factors involved in the education sector. Scholarship status, age, extra-curriculum activities, and parents' education are factors that affect the quality of education (Allam, 2020). The factors are likely to be experienced in Saudi Arabia because of the differences in social background. Allam (2020) found that nudging can help improve the excellence of students from a business program in Saudi Arabia. The authorities may be involved in ensuring positive aspects are achieved by incorporating quality education in the learning institutions. The leadership styles and performance of employees in Saudi Arabia may influence the quality of education (Allam, 2020). The

leadership style may play a critical role in ensuring that education institutions achieve all the critical measures. The teaching and institutional factors must be addressed to improve the excellence of education.

### **Ranking Systems**

Higher education ranking systems in Saudi Arabia must conform to international standards. The comparison may help improve the quality of education in the institutions based on the people's interests. Webometrics can initiate and motivate higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia into the international ranking system (Alduais, 2019). The university management must ensure they have university websites for building academic efforts. The efforts may also involve engaging in approaches that promote the quality of education of the learning institutions. The Saudi higher education institutions are manifesting internal affairs towards keeping their current position (Alduais, 2019).

The ranking of universities creates a battle for excellence, a positive aspect of the education sector (Alduais, 2019, 353). The concept of excellence may be enhanced where the learners can have a framework to achieve their objectives. Therefore, they can leverage the available resources towards ensuring the performance is either improved or maintained.

Alduais (2019) suggested that immediate changes that took place in the education institutions helped the classification of universities. The Saudi higher education institution first appeared in the Webometrics in 2006 and Shanghai ranking in 2009 (Alduais, 2019). The historical background of the ranking system in the country plays a critical role in enhancing positive outcomes. In 2017, King Abdulaziz University was ranked among the country's leading universities (Alduais, 2019). The ranking system may encourage higher education institutions to

embrace approaches that will help promote the learning aspects. Therefore, the educators may have an objective towards achieving the expected outcomes during the training process.

The institutions should focus on the specialization of aspects that will help achieve their objectives. Therefore, the ranking system may form a basis for quality improvement in the learning institutions.

### **Higher Recognition and Ranking Systems**

Higher recognition of universities may help enhance the acceptance of degree programs offered in the institutions. The NCAA may be involved in the recognition after the university undergoes an evaluation. However, the government may be involved in the recognition by empowering all the departments. The universities should have all the resources and approaches that may help promote the quality of education. Smith and Abdulrahman (2013) suggested that almost all Saudi universities have quality deans, centers, and committees. The internal quality assurance mechanisms may help in contributing toward higher recognition. The internal mechanisms help achieve positive aspects by addressing some issues affecting the quality of education.

On the other hand, ranking systems may effectively enhance the standards that may help achieve positive goals. International standards may be incorporated into the institutions through the improvement of approaches that improve quality education. The National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education is involved in managing test entries of Saudi universities (Smith & Abdulrahman, 2013). The management helps enhance the quality of education by incorporating approaches that may help achieve positive aspects of the university. The Saudi government provides funds for professional development, textbook review, incorporation of IT, and innovative practice (Smith & Abdulrahman, 2013). These improvements are vital for addressing

quality development and recognition of the institutions. Higher institutions with the necessary resources may be recognized based on the institution's performance and positive aspects.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia experiences challenges based on environmental changes. Educational institutions were closed during the Covid-19 pandemic to reduce the transmission of the infection (Conto et al., 2020; Alshaikh et al., 2020). The lockdown and restriction measures affected the learning process because of the school closure. However, restrictions were required for the management of disease transmission.

The Ministry of education in Saudi Arabia embraced a temporary emergency policy to address education challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic (Alshaikh et al. 2020). The policy encouraged online education, which was effective during the pandemic because of reduced interaction levels. Therefore, university students benefitted from the program in acquiring knowledge and skills. Currently, Saudi Arabia universities are utilizing e-learning to enhance education quality (Alshaikh et al., 2020; Aljaber, 2018). This is a critical evolution that may help achieve positive outcomes at the societal level.

The Saudi higher education system experiences challenges in the accreditation and productivity in normal operations. The research perspectives of the university are expected to meet the current societal needs. However, challenges will likely be experienced in incorporating evidence-based approaches. As of 2016, Saudi Arabia had a population of 32 430,000, where 55.2% were men and 44.8% were women (Alharbi, 2016).

The growth of the population may create a great demand for resources in the education sector. The challenges in the educational sector may affect the concept of excellence in higher education. The growing population indicates the need to enhance education to meet the prevailing

needs. Therefore, higher education institutions should embrace approaches that will help achieve positive outcomes.

Higher education institutions require resources that may help enhance the research perspectives in the country. Alharbi (2016) reported that universities might acquire resources from the government, tuition fees, public organizations, and private firms. However, acquiring the resources may be a challenge in meeting the objectives of the education institutions. Financial returns may help enhance the continuity of quality education in higher education institutions. Higher education in the Middle East is experiencing bureaucratic systems, poor participation, and authoritative regulation (Asel, 2020). These challenges will likely affect how individuals make decisions in higher education institutions. Therefore, there is a need to address the challenges of enhancing excellence in higher education.

In addition, academic satisfaction is a factor that should be improved while implementing distant learning. Alshaikh et al. (2020) proposed that a theoretical framework is necessary to make improvements to e-learning. When the innovative framework is used, the framework may be able to contribute to improving the continuity of education. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education has introduced certain new laws, which, when put into effect, will assist in the process of regulating the procedures involved in the final examinations (Alshaikh et al., 2020).

Because of the follow-up, the laws could make it easier to realize the ideal of excellence in the field of higher education. As a result, the administration of the university will be expected to adopt strategies that will contribute to the provision of high-quality education. The attitudes that the students had regarding the epidemic had an effect on the manner in which they welcomed the technological advancements that were made in the educational sector. The professional

developers are responsible for incorporating various training strategies that will improve the quality of remote learning.

### **3.9 Way Forward: Summary of where the understanding of quality today.**

Academic institutions are now concerned about bringing excellence in their educational and business activities. The term excellence can be elaborated as the quality and the appreciable quality. It is not easy for organizations to gain excellence in their activities. Academic institution is the organizations that provide academic education to students and is considered to be an independent business entity. The concept of excellence has existed in academic institutions from the very start. The educational and academic organizations are highly concerned about bringing excellence and transparency to the educational system (Castella, 2014).

According to Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford (2015), four quality indicators may help to define quality. The first indicator of quality was "Administrative indicators," which help the educational institutions establish their vision and mission, establish institutional legitimacy, set and achieve standard external and internal goals, and increase the institution's performance.

The second quality indicator was "student support," which helps the students improve their educational performance, solve their problems, and provide the best education. The third performance indicator is the "instructional indicator," which makes a connection between an instructor's competency and institutional content. Forth indicator is improving students' engagement in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As a result, a large number of incentives are developed by these academic organizations to improve the quality of education. In such a challenging and competitive environment, the

educational organization considers excellence mandatory to gain a successful position in the market and secure students' future. As a result, high-quality education by modern means positively impacts students' professional and educational life (Aldiab et al., 2019).

At the start of 1925, the country faced the issue of a lack of educational and academic institutions as the country had only four elementary schools. To enhance the quality of education, a new Education Directorate was employed that developed educational policies. Hence, compulsory education was considered mandatory at first. The educational system at the start was developed and implemented in Saudi Arabia according to Egypt's educational system. Still, the government and educational experts find deficiencies in the educational system. As a result, by considering educational needs and requirements, the first educational institute in Saudi Arabia was developed by considering Islamic educational requirements.

Due to the development of Saudi Arabia's educational system, the first Islamic school was developed in 1933 by considering disseminating knowledge and the Islamic educational system. Many technological schools were also developed considering the new Saudi Arabia educational system. The Education Directorate was provided significant educational controls to develop an appropriate education system and ensure the quality of education (Bakhotmah 2020).

According to the report presented by the United States, there exist three hundred and six elementary schools. While in contrast, the literacy rates were high. The government's actions against the increasing illiteracy and a significant system were developed to ensure a high-quality educational environment in academic and technical institutes. Incentives were also developed for girls' education across the country. As a result of the significant educational system, Saudi Arabia is recognized globally (Aldiab et al., 2019).



Moreover, the students were promoted to get educated, and motivation activities were carried forward to eliminate illiteracy. Over fifty percent of students were allowed to get promoted to general secondary education to achieve a university degree. Technical training was also provided to teachers to increase the level of education and education assurance within the organization. Higher education was also declared mandatory for women. As a result, a significant system was developed that ensured appropriate education of women and man on the national level (Aldiab et al., 2019).

Blanco-Portela et al. (2018) argued that sustainable change could be classified into internal structures, external factors, resource availability, stakeholder, and institutional framework. The coordination of these aspects can help achieve the desired outcomes when embracing change. Combining bottom-up and top-down approaches helps enhance sustainable changes in institutions (Blanco-Portela et al., 2018). However, governmental support may be required to ensure the institutions meets the desired objectives. Excellence in higher education can be achieved when people are ready for changes.

Higher education institutions should improve the integrative systems and rigid structures to enhance the changes (Blanco-Portela et al., 2018). The rigid structures are vital and may help improve higher education excellence by incorporating the required changes. The coordination may be vital for the improvement of the institutional framework.

Alshaikh et al. (2020) suggested that educational culture should consist of vision, standards, plan, and values. These are critical aspects that should be incorporated into a learning institution towards improving the concept of excellence. The top management should support decisions and regulations that promote education quality (Alshaikh et al., 2020). The decision made at the institution must be based on the vision and values of the university. The professors

and administrative staff at the university should participate in the decision-making process (Alshaikh et al., 2020). The process should be informative and effective in enhancing the higher education levels. Saudi Arabia's higher education system should adopt a benchmarking strategy for solving the challenges experienced in the universities (Alharbi, 2016). The benchmarking approach may help promote positive aspects through the incorporation of evidence-based approaches.

Asel (2020) suggested that Saudi's higher education should be supported to achieve vision 2030. The transformational vision may be incorporated into the institutions where they can contribute to economic development. The support may involve improving approaches that may help enhance the quality of education. Transparency, accountability, and active participation are critical attributes that may help improve higher education (Asel, 2020). These practices may be incorporated through the leadership aspects in the education institutions. Asel (2020) reported that university employees should understand the major elements of higher education governance. The understanding may play a critical role in the improvement of quality education. The university's governance should improve the performance indicators in the education sector.

Additionally, the university governance may be involved in achieving the institution's vision. The Ministry of education in Saudi Arabia adopts a flexible policy that promotes innovation and excellence (Asel, 2020). The policy should involve the university governance where the stakeholders must be involved. Saudi universities should embrace autonomy in the operations and allocation of resources to enhance quality education (Asel, 2020). Learning opportunities in the institutions should provide a platform where students' personal characteristics are improved. Participative governance may be required in the institutions where each stakeholder

is given a chance to incorporate changes in the learning institution. However, the students must be informed of the changes when embracing the educational policy.

Smith and Abdulrahman (2013) found that higher education in Saudi Arabia has immense potential as a world-class concept. However, the institutions and government must prioritize approaches that may help promote quality education. Addressing the quality and usability of higher education is a major priority in Saudi Arabia (Smith & Abdulrahman, 2013). These aspects may be addressed by incorporating evidence-based approaches in higher education institutions. Saudi higher education requires a strategic plan that involves a vision, implementation plan, and feedback on the goals (Smith & Abdulrahman, 2013). The plan's objectives may include the challenges experienced in the education sector. These changes may play a critical role in enhancing higher education's concept of excellence and quality.

### **3.10 Higher Education Quality & Quality Assurance (Excellence) and Ranking Systems**

There is a difference between quality and excellence because these terms overlap at some point of concern. The quality and quality assurance in education are related to quality management. The quality management process deals with quality and quality assurance. As a result, both terms overlap each other. Furthermore, quality and quality assurance are operations performed to improve the process. The organizational management develops and proposes policies to ensure the quality of organizational activities as the educational directorate develops a new educational system to ensure the quality of education (Shaturaev ,2021). While on the other hand, significant policies and procedures are also developed and implemented to bring accidence to organizational activities. The educational organizations are concerned with providing the student and other stakeholders with high-quality assurance (Soni & Govender, 2018).

Since higher educational institutes focus more on the quality of their educational system, that's why they also try to focus on certain policies by evaluating the effectiveness of their policies and making their quality assurance system more effective (Soni & Govender, 2018).

It may be challenging to determine what exactly constitutes "quality" in educational environments. Universities are putting more emphasis on determining the specific concept of excellence in their own institutions in the hopes that this would assist students in launching successful careers. Students may get further information on the educational program from academic employees at universities and colleges (Dicker, Mikey, Alison, & Mulrooney, 2019).

Quality assurance is also considered the other fact that represents the overlap between quality, and quality assurance is that the academic institute employs these terms to ensure stakeholder satisfaction. The stakeholders of academic and educational institutes include students, teachers, instructions, academic institutes' management, parents, and the community. The educational organization develops standards and methodologies to improve quality and bring excellence to ensure consumer satisfaction. (Thakur, 2007) Because of this, it should be no surprise that quality and quality assurance are connected to one another in some way. Although it is inefficient in gathering data inside the business, the ranking system is useful in monitoring any weaknesses. (Fuchs, 2022). This system helps rank the high-quality academic activities and the activities involved in ensuring quality assurance. The ranking system also ensures examination of the whole organizational system and determination of issues resulting in weakness in the education system.

Ranking systems are effective in understanding the quality assurance of higher education institutions. Mikhaylov and Anna (2018) suggested that national university ranking systems are deployed in quality assessment. The assessment may play a critical role in enhancing competition

among higher learning institutions. The systems help improve quality education that effectively enhances student satisfaction. Therefore, the school administration may work towards the improvement of excellence in the learning institution. The administrator may pursue to achieve the "world-class" category to enhance their ranking. Therefore, changes may be incorporated towards the improvement of the education system. The changes may involve improving the positive rating of the university. The modification may be effective in achieving the desired outcomes during the education of the students. The ranking system helps enhance the educational level and develop a sense of responsibility, and the lower-ranked activity enhances the quality. As a result, the quality management team considers the lower-ranked educational activities to improve the quality.

International ranking systems help understand higher education institutions' success (Giesenbauer& Müller-Christ, 2020). The universities are expected to embrace approaches that help in maintaining good positions in the ranking systems. Higher education institutions may develop by improving education, research, governance, operations, and culture (Giesenbauer& Müller-Christ, 2020). These aspects are likely to be used in the ranking system where the institutions are expected to provide quality education. The improvement of education and research may involve incorporating standard knowledge and focusing on strong theories (Giesenbauer& Müller-Christ, 2020). The institutions are expected to have conducive structures that help promote the education perspectives. Higher education institutions compete for better ranking through a quantitative process (Giesenbauer& Müller-Christ, 2020). The process may involve improving aspects that promote the university's training and research.

The academic community recognizes that ranking agencies are here to stay by providing university league tables (Mikhaylov& Anna, 2018). The agencies play a vital role in enhancing

excellence in higher education. Universities are expected to embrace approaches that help to improve educational approaches. Mikhaylov and Anna (2018) stated that there is a need for the ranking system to integrate consistent indicators. It is possible that consistency can play a significant part in improving the complete analysis. The research findings further revealed that a national strategy is needed to improve educational standards. The policy framework could be useful in the development of strategies that can influence the ranking system.

Additionally, quality assurance and ranking systems are related because the improvement of assurance levels increases the ranking systems. A special type of ranking may be incorporated towards assessing the strengths of higher education institutions (Mikhaylov & Anna, 2018). The strengths may be effective in enhancing the university's position based on the performance and quality of education. World-class universities should expose students to the realities of the world. Therefore, they may incorporate approaches that enhance the learning attributes to address the current problems. Higher institutions should embrace strategies that will help improve their rankings. Innovative approaches may be required to improve the quality of education. The approaches may involve ensuring that societal needs are addressed holistically.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

The concept of excellence in higher education may be enhanced through the improvement of quality education. The medieval period significantly impacted the development of quality and excellence in higher education. It formed a basis where institutions were built and a framework formulated for educating the people. This research came to the conclusion that an increase in the number of persons interested in obtaining a higher education leads to a rise in the competition amongst universities to provide the best educational system in their respective organizations.

They are critical to ensure their best work by acquiring the most relevant knowledge possible and searching out the most qualified teachers. For this reason, they establish a rating system for the greatest colleges and send their teachers to other prestigious educational institutions so that they may get more education. They develop specialized educational frameworks to enhance the overall quality and standing of the educational institutions in their countries.

However, the evolution of the world as a whole brought about changes that were accepted in higher education. The elite universities enjoy a long history of training and resource development. Therefore, they will likely embrace approaches that may help enhance quality and excellence. International ranking systems such as Webometrics are incorporated towards improving the quality. The systems may help improve the quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. They may create a perception that may lead to the marketing of high-ranking institutions.

The Saudi Arabia government has been involved in the incorporation of approaches that affects the education system. It helps in policy formulation and provision of resources to the learning institutions. Higher education faces challenges such as inadequate resources, technological innovations, social change, and population growth. Universities are expected to embrace approaches that will help address the challenges. The improvement may play a critical role in the university setting where the training and research can be addressed holistically.

This study also found that a strategic plan addressing quality and usability in Saudi Arabia can improve higher education. The strategic plan may involve all the stakeholders who may help address the challenges experienced in the learning institutions.

## **Ranking Systems**

This chapter begins by exploring Neoliberalism as an essential and broad theoretical reference in framing an understanding of the context of ranking in higher education and the global extension of its logic. This framework helps provide the groundwork for understanding the role of globalization and the internationalization of higher education before proceeding to address the origin and form of various higher education ranking systems and the emergence of globalized ranking systems. Furthermore, this chapter considers the impact of ranking systems on higher education, as well as their critical reception in some quarters. Finally, the chapter highlights the need for improvements to ranking systems in HE.

### **4.1 Neoliberalism and the Neoliberalisation of Higher Education as a Theoretical Frame**

This study explores the background and expansion of ranking systems in higher education in relation to a broader theoretical framework derived from neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005) and the process of institutional neoliberalization in universities (Ball, 2016). The ideological, policy-related, and organizational aspects of neoliberalism have resulted in a more direct alignment of higher education systems with national economies. This has, in turn, contributed to the acceleration of the globalization of the higher education market, normalizing the use of comparisons, quality metrics, and rankings.

The term "neoliberalism" tends to be employed in three main ways: first, as a political ideology; second, as a descriptor for specific policy forms and organizational norms and processes; and third, as a model for restructuring states, advocated by global economic institutions, commonly known as the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 2004).



Neoliberalism manifests in three broad dimensions: the economy, politics, and the form of the institutional landscape, displaying, at a deeper level, linkages between these elements.

In the context discussed below, the most informative aspects of neoliberalism are its role as a political ideology and its function as a descriptor or classification for various policy forms and organizational norms and processes.

#### **4.2 Neoliberalism as a Political Ideology**

What has emerged in the later decades of the 20th century as neoliberalism can be seen as a new ideological stance, a distinct form of liberalism. Central to this ideology is the emphasis on the operation of the free market and the expansion of market principles to encompass all conceivable realms of governance and organization. Neoliberalism posits the significance of free trade, entrepreneurship, and the establishment of an extensive framework of private property rights (Harvey, 2005). According to this perspective, a fundamental role of the State is to ensure the existence of institutional infrastructure that sustains and enables markets to function in an unrestricted environment. In the words of Harvey (2005, p. 2), this is identifiable as 'privatization, deregulation, market competition, consumer choice, unconstrained markets.' Neoliberalism represents a new political paradigm in terms of its breadth, role, and vision of the ideal State. However, it also maintains connections with earlier classical forms of liberalism, which emphasized personal liberty, individualism, economic freedom, equality before the law, limited government, and the safeguarding of spaces for free association (Deneen, 2019). As neoliberalism has gained dominance and globalized, undergoing extensive operationalization, its assumptions and rationale have evolved and influenced the development of various policy forms and organizational norms. This has also impacted the functioning of public institutions and regulated

organizations, including higher education. The term "neoliberalism" has been utilized to describe or categorize this stream of policy, the implementation of marketized norms, and its organizational culture. Significantly, the rise of ranking systems in higher education both mirrors and perpetuates this manifestation of neoliberalism.

The application of neoliberalism is transformative in its very nature and not merely in its economic forms. Neoliberal restructuring involves substantial changes in economic systems together with governmental reforms focusing on transitioning into arrangements that seek dynamic market approaches. Neoliberalism has taken a step further in becoming a strong form of politics that goes beyond economic theory. It manifests in politics, governance, policy, and social settings, including state constructions. Neoliberalism constitutes a broad ideology beyond economic decision-making and affects the whole political context surrounding the economy.

#### **4.3 Neoliberalism as a Policy and Institutional Form**

Neoliberalism applied is a transformational force that changes the operational, organizational, and governance structures of organizations. This dimension, the policy and institutional form of neoliberalism, recognizes policy forms and institutional types under neoliberalism. This form of institution underscores a breakaway from older traditional forms of government. Neoliberalism is a vigorous and multidimensional approach affecting economics, politics, and institutions and their structures and processes. Its ascendancy, since the 1980s, provides the context to its complex expression in higher education systems.

University administrators worldwide are today navigating an intricate landscape of global competitiveness within the dynamic realm of higher education in contemporary times. As noted by Craig & Cotterell (2007), in the broader framework of Neoliberalism, a notable characteristic

of the pursuit of excellence is the emergence of university ranking systems. The global landscape of higher education has transformed as a result of the pervasive influence of Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, characterized by market-oriented policies, a competitive atmosphere, and a strong emphasis on individualism, has significantly shaped the fundamental principles of higher education worldwide.

This chapter explores the challenges associated with university ranking systems and the strategies employed by educational institutions to enhance their position within the educational hierarchy. Economic indicators, rankings, and the dynamics of global rivalry are emerging as influential factors increasingly shaping the landscape of higher education (Humphrys, 2018). The discourse around university rankings exemplifies a more significant paradigm shift within the higher education sector, under forms of neoliberal ideology. The correlation between the neoliberal backdrop and the emergence of ranking systems is a noteworthy aspect that warrants more investigation. This association sheds light on the broader transformations occurring in education systems during an era characterized by globalization and market-driven approaches.

Like many other nations, Saudi Arabia encounters the challenging endeavor of enhancing the reputation of its educational institutions within the context of university ranking systems in the ever-evolving educational landscape. Such projects operate in a distinctively neoliberal framework, which is intricately intertwined with the broader narrative of global economic competitiveness. Within this theoretical framework the educational progress and ambitions of Saudi Arabia emerge as profoundly embedded in a neoliberal context where institutions function as centers for knowledge and human capital production, together with the ambition to be significant participants in the international higher education market.

#### **4.4 Neoliberalism and the Impact on University Ranking Systems**

There is an intricate interplay between Neoliberalism, university classification systems, and the worldwide context of higher education. This section expands upon the theoretical framework established to explore the many ramifications of Neoliberalism within the realm of higher education and university rankings. According to research by Ryan (2017), Neoliberalism may be characterized as more than just a political philosophy, as it can bring about significant transformations in society's political and institutional realms. Within the realm of higher education, this phenomenon brings about a fundamental shift in the structure of institutions, propelling them towards a style of operation that is more market-oriented, competitive, corporate, and attuned to economic demands. This process of transitioning in culture is important in understanding the behaviour displayed by institutions and their ongoing efforts to enhance their rankings.

#### **4.5 Transformation of Institutional Values and Norms**

In the contemporary neoliberal paradigm, universities are no longer perceived as autonomous establishments dedicated to pursuing abstract forms of knowledge and open enquiry. There is a growing shift to perceive them within the context of their contribution to the economy and as participants in a highly competitive higher education market. This transition implies a repudiation of conventional academic principles and an acceptance of neoliberal attitudes and behaviours. Universities face significant pressures to alter their viewpoints, adopt administrative methodologies, and prioritize measurable results to enhance their position within the global academic arena.

This, decades long, paradigm change occurring inside institutions has wide-ranging implications, impacting not only academic strategies but also the whole management, structure, and operation of universities (Byrne, 2017). Institutions have seen a shift in their foundational principles and underlying assumptions. While initially grounded in more conventional ideals, they are now influenced by a neoliberal ideology emphasizing efficiency, competitiveness, and economic significance. As a result, on a global scale, educational institutions face significant pressure to modify their approaches and adopt neoliberal ideologies to achieve competitiveness.

#### **4.6 Universities as Instruments of Economic Growth**

Governments adhering to the neoliberal paradigm perceive universities as entities that serve as educational institutions and, significantly, catalysts for fostering economic development. The neoliberal paradigm posits that academic institutions should utilize knowledge generation to bolster the domestic economy (Goglio, 2016). As a result, universities serve a dual function by generating novel knowledge and fostering economic development. The continuous intertwining of higher education with business has rendered universities indispensable for the growth and vitality of the economy.

In addition, universities have evolved into substantial economic contributors, employing significant portions of the national workforce, and earning revenue via providing services, research activities, and in particular for many, the enrolment of overseas students. Governments seek economic growth, often anticipating that educational institutions can attract a substantial influx of overseas students, further stimulating economic returns. The fundamental essence of the contemporary neoliberal agenda within institutions is a relentless quest for global ascendancy and a steadfast dedication to policies rooted in a market orientation. Neoliberalism now functions as a

comprehensive policy and institutional culture, compelling universities to operate within a complex global terrain where they must fulfil the highly competitive requirements for rankings and act as economic entities in their own jurisdictions, (Hazelkorn, 2018). This dual position necessitates the implementation of stringent internal management practices, constant strategic planning, and competitive processes reflective of a neoliberalised organization. The phenomenon of the neoliberalisation of HE emphasizes the correlation between neoliberalism and university rankings. The inherent neoliberal characteristics of ranking systems reflects a prevailing global competitive landscape and the institutional processes of neoliberalism.

In the subsequent sections, attention is turned to consideration of how the Saudi higher education system confronts the aforementioned neoliberal influences in looking to achieve success within the global academic sphere. A wider neoliberal framework of reference helps to illustrate the alignment between the Saudi strategy and a neoliberal worldview while also evaluating the many problems and possibilities to be negotiated on the way to ranking success. This study aims to support the trajectory of Saudi Arabia's institutions in navigating the intricate landscape of ranking systems in the neoliberal order.

#### **4.7 Ranking Systems: Symptomatic of Neoliberalism**

The preceding discussion has illuminated the interdependent relationship between university ranking systems and Neoliberalism. The existence of ranking systems is evidence of the prevailing neoliberal ideology emphasizing competition and evaluation within modern society. Utilizing these systems to evaluate colleges, facilitate global comparisons, and foster competitiveness among higher education institutions offers clear advantages. Within Neoliberalism's framework, colleges and governments are increasingly using ranking systems to

showcase their competitive edge and achievements (Reddy, Xie, & Tang, 2016). Given that these rankings function as a metric for assessing an institution's global competitiveness and importance, striving for higher rankings is now assumed to be in an institutions' best interest.

#### **4.8 Neoliberalism and Institutional Transformation**

The rise of Neoliberalism precipitated a notable era of profound alteration inside the higher education establishments of nations. Throughout history, universities have adhered to values emphasizing the dissemination of knowledge, the autonomy of academic pursuits, and the advancement of societal well-being. The neoliberal worldview significantly transforms the ideals and norms of colleges (Cornelissen, 2023), characterised by a shift towards the adoption of a market-driven approach. The emergence of neoliberal principles, characterized by a focus on efficiency, competitiveness, and the importance of the economy, underscores this transition. Universities are required to realign their perspectives, emphasizing quantitative metrics such as research output, students' employability, and efforts towards internationalization.

In addition to its academic implications, the neoliberal revolution has been deeply ingrained into the institutional framework of universities. Universities have adapted their governance, administration, and policy frameworks to conform to the tenets of neoliberal organisations and policy forms, emphasizing the significance of efficiency and competitiveness. The ongoing shift observed in universities at organizational and regulatory levels signifies a steady neo-liberalization process. This transformation significantly affects these institutions' fundamental objectives and operational dynamics.

#### **4.9 The University as a Global Player**

Neoliberal ideology emphasizes competitiveness in both local and international contexts. Universities operate in a highly competitive global economy, competing at national and international levels to enhance their global reputation and prestige. The strategic planning of elite and rising universities revolves around the quest for global excellence as institutions increasingly establish regulatory structures and monitor commercial activity. Institutions must secure research funding, attract international students, establish partnerships, and participate in global rankings to enhance their standing within the international community (Ban, 2016). The prevalence of competitive behaviours has reordered collegiate settings, leading to the implementation of neoliberal strategies by universities to thrive in the competitive global higher education landscape. It is assumed that individuals are essential active participants in a highly competitive sector, within which one's rank and honour play critical roles.

#### **4.10 The Economic Imperative**

In the framework of economic neoliberalism, governments perceive universities as entities that serve a broader purpose than just educational institutions. These entities are seen as crucial elements in fostering growth and facilitating economic prosperity. It is expected that the knowledge generated by universities will address societal challenges and contribute to economic advancement. It is assumed that there is a need for universities and the economy to establish a stronger alignment in order to effectively fulfil their respective roles. Universities are to play a crucial role in a nation's strategy for fostering economic development through new knowledge with commercial potential.



As a consequence of this development, universities generate partnerships and offshoots as economic enterprises. They are expected to contribute to the expansion of the economy, generating employment opportunities on a significant scale, and offer a diverse array of services, all of which potentially result in significant benefits to national prosperity. One illustrative instance is the substantial contribution of successful higher education sectors to a nation's gross domestic product (GDP) through the financial influx generated by international student tuition fees, housing rentals, and many other expenditures.

The correlation between the economic role of universities and the ideology of Neoliberalism substantiates the argument that universities operate as both generators of knowledge and drivers of economic growth. Governments, in the context of global competition, place significant emphasis on the obligations of universities in the areas of workforce development, technology transfer, and economic innovation. They also anticipate a tangible return on public investments made in higher education.

#### **4.11 Theoretical Framework: Understanding University Ranking Systems in a Neoliberal Context**

Analysing aspects of university ranking systems, including their origin, effects, and reactions, requires a particular vantage point. Neoliberalism constitutes the context which helps to explain at a higher level, why it is seen as normal for universities to be globally ranked. Neoliberalisation is a complex order that encompasses a variety of themes (Azevedo et al., 2019). Hackworth (2019), suggests that Neoliberalism facilitates the privatization of education, which in turn entails an increased focus on numerical performance assessments such as rankings. The theoretical approach underpinning this study assumes that the consolidation of neoliberalism has

led to forms of neomanagerialism resulting in new structures aligning with university ranking and altering the behaviour of institutions under such systems.

### **Neo-Managerialism**

Neo-managerialism is important in the broader perspective of the neoliberal order. This perspective highlights the increasing trend of managerialism within higher education, whereby academic institutions are adopting corporate-style administrative and governance practices.

Ranking systems for universities can be seen as instruments that facilitate and reinforce this neo-managerial ideology, compelling academic institutions to adopt commercial strategies to enhance their reputation.

Considering these factors, this theoretical framework presents university ranking systems as indicative of the influence of Neoliberalism on higher education. The project proceeds against this contextual background for examining how Saudi Arabia can navigate these systems within a neoliberal framework. It emphasizes the significance of perceiving ranking systems as integral components of a broader neoliberal restructuring of higher education rather than simply just assessment tools. This approach aligns with the research objectives as it establishes a connection between the critical examination of ranking systems and their implications for the Saudi Higher Education System. In aiming to improve the esteem of institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this study has sought to understand the impact of university categorization systems on the current landscape of higher education, against a background of a globalized Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has transformed educational establishments' core principles, roles, and positions, influencing their policies, processes, and integration within broader economic and geopolitical

frameworks. The rise of ranking systems can be understood as a coherent reflection of the globalization of neoliberal reason.

#### **4.12 Development of Ranking Systems**

The environment of higher education (HE) has transformed significantly since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the augmented demand for higher education has contributed to the success and development of higher education ranking systems (HERS). Systems that, essentially, evaluate higher education systems as well as institutions as per their relative position on a worldwide rank (Altbach, 2015). The development of HERS has contributed significantly towards the increase in competition amongst higher education institutions and the development of new standards within the majority of nations (Altbach, 2015). Moreover, Marginson (2007) concludes that the influence of international rankings can barely be exaggerated. They are now commonly considered as reasonably objective measures of institutional quality and the concurrence in the ranking order of named universities, in diverse ranking systems, has tended to legitimise this opinion (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013).

They now impact the decisions and judgements of university leaders and faculty, potential students, state policy regulators and developers and market and philanthropic stakeholders (Altbach, 2015). It is frequently supposed that highly ranked institutions are especially prolific in research activity and output, involve superior quality teaching and contribute more towards the community as compared to lower ranked institutions (Merisotis, 2012). As a result, HERS are frequently employed as promotional resources for universities, making it possible for them to

compete globally for human and economic resources (Jarocka, 2012). Subsequently, HERS have become well established as recognized instruments for evaluating the esteem of a university.

The ranking of HE institutions is recognised to not only involve the private sector and global media but many other interested professional associations and government institutions. Since the inception of HERS many debates focusing on the methodologies, the impact, objectivity and replicability of ranking results have surfaced within countries that use these systems. Over the last decade, ranking results have been an issue of public scrutiny; partly because of escalating tuition fees within HE. There is a need for more research on how university ranking systems can be improved, this chapter considers the growing body of literature on higher education ranking systems. Furthermore, there is still little understanding on the various ways that ranking systems may affect HEs as it relates to their influence on career choices and employment prospects.

The US system was the first system to massify and is today the dominant context within the global landscape. One aim of this chapter is to address and seek to understand the multifaceted ways in which ranking systems function as well as understanding how ranking systems around the world differ from or influence the current ranking practices in the United States. The United States boasts a high proportion of the world's elite institutions, as per university ratings. Around sixty-six of the top 100 universities in the world are located in the United States. The US was ranked first in the 1-1000 top universities category in the Ranking Web of Universities' July edition, with a score of 253 (Myers & Robe, 2009). This chapter presents an effort to collate the findings of various researchers and rankers around the world in a bid to examine various perspectives on how rankings are arrived at and the lessons that can be learnt towards improving the current status of HERS.

#### **4.13 The Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education**

There is little doubt that globalisation has been compelling transformations across all knowledge-concentrated segments of society (Merisotis, 2012). The logic of economic globalisation has progressed towards a single global marketplace and resulted in an intensified emphasis upon HERS (Marginson, 2007). Within such a fast moving worldwide economy, knowledge is now considered as being the vital source for competitive advantage (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Subsequently, knowledge communities are contending for capability and HERS have become influential in accomplishing a competitive advantage with around 17,000 institutions developing within an extremely competitive worldwide environment for higher education (Altbach, 2015).

Prospects for students to spend part or the entirety of their higher education careers outside their nation of origin or residence have increased radically over the period of the past 10 years (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Moreover, the OECD has published data that shows that overall students going to institutes outside their nation of origin increased three times between the periods of 1985 to 2008 (Jarocka, 2015). Globally, mobile students are anticipated to account for 8 million of the population of HE by the year 2025 with overall worldwide tertiary enrolments predicted to peak at around 21 million between the period of 2011 to 2020 (Altbach, 2015). The advantages of global student mobility include increased revenue, as well as the formation of strong worldwide alumni connections for institutions, access to superior-quality students, as well as culturally varied education for learners and competent- migrant streams for governments (Merisotis, 2012). International experience is normally considered as a means for providing

graduates and scholars with a new outlook and perceptions, which would support their ability to functioning within a globalised community (Jarocka, 2015).

#### **4.14 Higher education ranking systems**

In 1983, the United States News began, what is contended as the first significant HERS. Since that time, several commercial media companies as well as research institutes have introduced their own ranking systems and ranking techniques have extended globally (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Ranking is a recognized concept, and a basic compact definition of institutional ranking will include consistent procedures and methodology for evaluating the relative standing of an institutions or of particular segments of their performance (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Most rankings intend to evaluate the quality of institutions along with their programmes in a range of domains and types for which a listing is produced (Marginson, 2006).

The United States News ranking publication in 1983, highlighted performance related to undergraduate programmes from several American higher education institutions (Altbach, 2015). By making use of performance indicators like academic standing, retention rates, admission selectivity, and lastly, financial and academic resources. This ranking publication evolved to become a high-profile evaluation of American institutions and has outlasted the print version of the magazine (Marginson and Wende, 2007). By the end of the 1990s various lists, and rankings of American undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and forms of league tables had become established (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). In this time-period, several domestic rankings of institutions also started appearing throughout Asia and Europe (Marginson, 2007). At this time domestic newspapers within the UK began developing university league tables grounded upon a

range of statistics made public through government and university institutions, all making use of markedly diverse standards (Jarocka, 2015).

The French newspaper *Liberation* developed a European ranking system called “Les 100 Meilleures Universités en Europe,” listing leading universities with respect to particular subjects and sections grounded upon their apparent standings among academics (Merisotis, 2012). Within Asia, the Hong Kong-grounded *Asia week* magazine printed a global ranking i.e. “Asia’s best universities” from the year 1997 to 2000, ranking Asian institutions based upon an accumulation of admission data, reputational standing, as well as research outcome indicators (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013).

#### **4.15 Emergence of Global Rankings**

The shift to university rankings on a worldwide scale, in a neoliberalised higher education context, can be seen as a natural development from their rapid expansion. It was argued that this kind of exercise offered governments a means for evaluating the research results and endeavours of national institutions and offering academic leaders important evaluation techniques that assisted senior management in benchmarking and strategic initiatives (Marginson, 2007). At this level, institutions were making comparisons with their global equivalents with respect to research superiority (Altbach, 2015). Additionally, comparisons were frequently performed on the grounds of publications within international journals, career destinations for leading investigators and global rewards. Such analysis of research performance offered an overview of the way institutions fared internationally in their sphere of expertise (Merisotis, 2012).

Commercially, international benchmarking is the process of analysing and comparing high-performing organisations. It functions in seeking a competitive advantage that helps organisations to make changes and achieve high levels of performance through transformation informed by evaluating results and practises. It is designed to achieve performance benchmarked against competitors all over the world. It assists leaders to comprehend where and how organisations need to reform to enhance quality.

At this time, a highly organized effort was being taken up within Shanghai, China. During the year 2003, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University printed their ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities) (Jarocka, 2015). The publication began as a benchmarking venture for Chinese institutions beginning in 1999 (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Professor Nian Cai Liu, along with assistance of three associates, devised a benchmarking model for global institutions originally directed towards informing Shanghai Jiao Tong University's strategic planning (Merisotis, 2012). At that time China was strategically aiming to produce world-class institutions and to do so they required to establish a description of world-class performance and benchmark leading Chinese institutions against leading institutions worldwide (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). The publication of the ARWU was impactful, not just within China, but across institutions and governments along with other stakeholders helping to establish global ranking (Altbach, 2015). The published rankings gained significant attention from conventional media globally and ARWU came to be regarded as being a highly significant global university ranking system (Merisotis, 2012)



#### 4.16 Critical Perspectives on University Ranking Systems

There exists a substantial literature exploring the way in which ranking systems have had a considerable affect on higher education institutions along with their stakeholders, whether individually or at a system level (Merisotis, 2012). Such substantiation, whether empirical or more anecdotal, has offered clear indications about the way ranking systems have changed the landscape of higher education (Harvey, 2008). The perceived quality of institutions and the competence of top management in such institutions have been impacted because of the evolving application of ranking systems (Liu and Cheng, 2005). For example, the Malaysian University, the oldest and one among the leading universities within Malaysia, fell around 80 places as per the THES rankings that to without any fall in its actual performance because of definitional modifications (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). This led to a replacement of the Vice-Chancellor as well as embarrassed the university that asserted within a commercial two months shy of the year 2005 THES outcomes, that it endeavoured as being amongst the 50 leading universities by the year 2020 (Altbach, 2015). Few institutions of higher education have turned out to be so apprehensive of rankings that they have declined to take part (Liu and Cheng, 2005). During the year 1999, the Tokyo University asserted that it will no more offer information to Asiaweek magazine regarding its yearly ranking of institutions within the Asia-Pacific (Merisotis, 2012). Additionally, also choosing to be out were 19 mainland Chinese institutions of higher education, taking in Peking University. Further, Asiaweek restrained its ranking soon after that (Liu and Cheng, 2005).

Lately, a group of around eleven institutes within Canada highlighted that they will no more take part in annual university ranking of Maclean's magazine within that nation (Marginson and Wende, 2007). The response of Maclean was basically that it will persist to rank such institutes by making use of information belonging to other public sources (Marginson, 2007).

Moreover, this basically highlights a significant progress with the wealth of information, which is gathered and made public through government officials, the willing participation of institutes in rankings is no more essential (Harvey, 2008). Ranking has impacted the national governments, chiefly in funds allocation (Marginson, 2007). Additionally, RAE (The Research Assessment Exercise) within the United Kingdom and PBRF (the Performance-based Research Fund) within New Zealand were announced in a bid for ensuring that brilliance in research is rewarded and encouraged (Merisotis, 2012). The LTPF is, therefore far, the Australian government's involvement towards ranking systems with RQF (the Research Quality Framework) to come (Jarocka, 2015). Within China, in spite of having recurrently highlighted that it doesn't assist ranking practices, the government of China has recognized a group of around 100 institutions, taking in a highly select group, that it considered satisfied particular excellence standards for receiving augmented funding for building a chain of 'world-class' institutions (Altbach, 2015).

More lately, Switzerland is also taking into consideration the institution of an élite system that will involve increasing universities funding as a means for maintaining their standing and improving overall quality (Liu and Cheng, 2005). There prevails agreement amongst a number of ranking investigators as well as university management that ranking system impacts students' decision-forming procedure in choosing a higher education institute (Marginson and Wende, 2007). It has been found that there prevails a powerful link amid league table ranking along with the comparative quality of students that are being admitted (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). It has been further discovered that students who search for admission in the leading institutes are more expected to make use of ranking tables. (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Also, there prevails anecdotal substantiation that university recruiters are highly being examined through likely students with respect to the university's position within league tables (Altbach, 2015). Additionally, within the

latest Monash audit through AUQA (the Australian Universities Quality Agency), the Audit Panel, in deliberations with students, discovered that Monash's positions and reputation in rankings had been the determining force in the majority of students' option of Monash like their place for study (Merisotis, 2012). Further, this was particularly so for global students studying within Australian and abroad campuses and ones in cooperative teaching alliances (Dill and Soo, 2005).

The rise in the overall number of students, part of the universities, costs associated with higher education, total number of students studying overseas and overall grants through governments and higher education institutes motivating global student mobility have too augmented customer demand for data (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Such data would be observed as being highly significant through these stakeholders at the time when provided in a way, which is simple to understand and at the time when it offers guidance (validated or not) with respect to the good value for money (Harvey, 2008). The PBRF and RAE manifestly have impacted employees' decision-forming procedure in choosing a higher education institute being an employer of choice (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Moreover, surveys of employers within the United Kingdom as well as the US also offer substantiation that 'standing of university attended' is one among the top eight factors, which employers look for at the time when employing graduates (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). As the worldwide war for expertise turns out to be highly aggressive, a globally acknowledged educational institute attached with a résumé is one means of differentiating oneself from some other likely candidates (Liu and Cheng, 2005). University rankings might impact the manner the insight of the contribution the institution makes towards its local society, nation and greatly the overall world as a whole (Marginson, 2007).

Moving ahead, within the United States, the Washington Monthly has positioned US colleges on the basis of community as well as national provision (Altbach, 2015). It claimed as being a controller for all American people who are apprehensive whether their higher education institutes are ‘making effective usage of tax dollars’, ‘generating graduates who could keep the country competitive within a modifying sphere and ‘performing effectively through focussing on good (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Despite the level of disapproval voiced in regard to the techniques employed within systems of ranking, they appear to be shaping and developing the conduct of universities (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Additionally, rankings are undoubtedly affecting the decision-forming and planning procedures within institutions of higher education (Harvey, 2008). Rolfe (2003) concludes that universities are taking on institutional practices and approaches designed for optimising their standing within ranking systems. Moreover, in devising the strategic guidelines of the university for example, several institutes, directly or indirectly prompted through the ranking systems, have at present devised mission statements for becoming ‘one among the leading universities worldwide’, ‘being amongst the globe’s actually good universities’ and one among the globe’s top-ranked institutions during the period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jarocka, 2015).

Further, this would hold a flow-on impact upon other facets of university procedures as institutional policies and supporting plans, like in those of finance, provisions and services, are devised for reinforcing the strategic course of the university (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). In addition, in closing such quality loop, ranking outcomes are highly being employed like performance indicators, turning out to be a fraction of an institute’s monitoring and evaluation procedures (Harvey, 2008). This, in return, helps in the progress of practical and systematic action for effecting enhancement (Merisotis, 2012).

However, it has been observed that ranking involves the loss of independence and freedom for institutes for controlling their brand as well as the terms of accomplishment (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Rankings place universities within a mould and have an impact upon the institutional diversity, thus having an impact upon the manner in which they function in as well as across higher education limits (Jarocka, 2015). It has been observed that the progress of a diversified higher education segment starts with universities that are different from one another with respect to mission (Altbach, 2015). Moving ahead, likenesses in mission statements of universities above will appear to propose that ranking systems might have incidentally affected diversity within the higher education segment (Dill and Soo, 2005). In case if such forethought hasn't already been integrated into the vision of the institution, particular spheres of the university will have been impacted through the appearance of ranking systems (Altbach, 2015).

For example, the rise in worldwide competition for superior quality employees along with costs associated with superior quality research, along with the effect of ranking systems within staff's decision-forming procedure, might impact a university's human resource practices (Liu and Cheng, 2005). This is particularly this with respect to RQF (Harvey, 2008). A sound position in several rankings is too presently mirrored within marketing materials of the foundations (Merisotis, 2012). The University of Wollongong is considered as being a good example, holding a complete page commercial promoting their position within the GUG and LTPF (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013).

Without any doubt, ranking systems compute quality for diverse stakeholders' group and thus, affect them in diverse manners (Merisotis, 2012). While the choice and selection of criteria might not satisfy individual institution's changeable standards, the approach could only enhance (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Moreover, ranking authors are placing their standing at high risk in case if

the method is uncertain and involves faults (Liu and Cheng, 2005). This might make sure highly consistent as well as valid systems during the future (Altbach, 2015). Additionally, a set of guidelines, Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions, has too been recognized through a group of specialists and developers of the university rankings called IREG (the International Ranking Expert Group) (Dill and Soo, 2005). These basically involve strategies for purpose clarity, intended audience and information sources (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Also, the ranking systems are being exposed to the acute eyes of education practitioners and academics and there prevails an overabundance of discussions related to their limits, method and impact upon the higher education industry (Jarocka, 2015).

Further, as they turn out to be highly widespread, investigation of the role ranking systems, like that of McDonough basically plays on behaviours and perceptions of chief stakeholders (like likely students along with their parents, employers, community and policy practitioners) would become highly widespread and common (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Additionally, while no one ranking could be considered as being definitive, they would continue to be a fraction of the higher educational system for some time to come for the reason that they satisfy a need i.e. commercial, academic or otherwise (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Moving ahead, a superior understanding about the method (like the most suitable selection of indicator measures, their rationality being measures of efficiency as well as the suitable statistical framework employed for ranking universities) and impacts of ranking systems must notify public discussion (Dill and Soo, 2005). Finally, the users of league tables must exercise carefulness at the time when making contrasts amid institutes, treating outcomes as being suggestive instead of definitive. Also, it is the accountability of ranking authors for adopting sound guidelines and practices at the time when devising ranking systems and highlighting the restrictions associated

with their usage (Harvey, 2008). A higher number of institutions are being ranked as well as contrasted. This is most effectively performed on the basis of objective data and in an essence of association (Altbach, 2015)

It is clear from the preceding discussion how the ranking system has significantly influenced and changed the landscape of higher education and how it has impacted the top management of institutes of higher education. It had an impact on university administrators who wanted to improve their rankings. As a result, several universities have stated that they will not participate in such a ranking (Liu and Cheng, 2005). This ranking had an impact on the reputations of several institutions as well as the national government's funding allocation (Marginson, 2007). Its impact can be evidenced by the fact that the Chinese government has recognised a group of around 100 institutions that it believes have met specific excellence standards to receive additional funding to assist in the development of a chain of "world-class" institutions (Altbach, 2015).

Switzerland, like China, is taking these steps because it has been observed that students prefer to apply to institutions that are at the top of the ranking table (Liu and Cheng, 2005). It has increased student global mobility and influenced how they learn about the institution's contribution to the world as a whole (Marginson, 2007). It benefits graduates who can outperform their peers around the world. Even though, ranking robs institutes of their independence and freedom, their results are frequently used as performance indicators, accounting for only a small part of an institute's monitoring and evaluation procedures (Harvey, 2008). As a result, practical and systematic action for improvement can be advanced (Merisotis, 2012). To summarise, ranking systems are being scrutinised by education practitioners and academics, and there are

numerous debates about their limitations, methods, and impact on the higher education industry (Jarocka, 2015).

Over the past few decades, the idea of world-class colleges has been growing in prominence in the context of higher education. These universities are considered the height of academic achievement because of their exceptional study, instruction, and societal impact. The idea of elite institutions has changed significantly throughout time. At first, elite status was linked to esteemed universities in Europe and the United States. But what is now considered a world-class university includes any university globally that excels in various areas, such as internationalization, teaching excellence, research output, and societal responsibility. These universities are essential to the worldwide knowledge industry because they attract top students, perform the necessary research, and significantly improve society.

University rankings have developed into essential instruments for assessing and contrasting educational facilities globally over the last few decades. According to (Salmi & Altbach, 2016), when evaluating institutions, renowned systems like the Times Higher Educational World University Ratings and the World University Rankings produced by QS, among other people, use a variety of distinctive criteria and assessment techniques.

Investigations like productive research, academic reputation, faculty-to-student measurements, and international type have been included in these methods.

Despite their widespread application, university ranking systems have become severely challenged recently. There is general agreement among academics that these structures exaggerate the complex nature of learning environments. As a result, they reduce the evaluation of educational facilities to numerical metrics, which can or cannot accurately represent the quality of research and instruction. According to Marginson (2021), the rankings



system pushes universities towards emphasizing research manufacturing over the efficacy of their education in the classroom, which can result in a more significant amount of organizational sameness among educational institutions.

The rankings of universities have an enormous impact on the colleges and universities that follow them. They impact administrative strategy, the allocation of assets, the recruitment of professors, and the trends of student enrollment. The practice, which correlates to the phenomenon described as a "rankings race," sees universities regularly investing significant funds to raise their rankings. The course has been criticized for potentially encouraging strategic behaviour that is not perpetually in line with the primary goal of universities. (Hammond, 2000)

The development of ranking systems has greatly influenced educational institutions. Today, universities across the globe consider their position in international rankings to be essential to their work and ability to be competitive. Universities have modified their tactics to improve their ranks due to the focus placed on scales. Universities spend money to enhance student experience, faculty calibre, and investigation effectiveness to achieve the standards developed by ranking systems.

Global ranking systems' expanding influence hasn't been lacking criticism. The plans have come under criticism for oversimplifying the complex institutions operate. Rankings, suggested by critics, constrain university assessment to quantitative indicators that need to be sufficiently representative of the quality of research and instruction (Marginson, 2021). There are concerns that the importance placed on research development in rankings could lead to teaching grades needing to be addressed.

University rankings are essential in encouraging competitiveness amongst international universities because they create a dynamic atmosphere that motivates schools to pursue greatness. These rankings, which are frequently produced by respectable journals and businesses, evaluate institutions according to a number of factors, including international diversity, research output, faculty quality, and academic repute. According to (Brankovic et al., 2018), universities become more competitive as they compete for higher rankings; this drives them to improve their research efforts, academic offerings, and overall institutional excellence. In addition to the universities themselves, learners and educational institutions at broad stand to gain from this competition. It stimulates the development of innovative instructional strategies, advances cutting-edge research, and facilitates the hiring of outstanding faculty.

Institutions in high-income countries generally outperform those in low- or middle-income countries in a variety of international rankings. Shahjahan et al., (2017) state that the disparity in rankings achievements could hinder the efforts of organizations in developing nations to go global and raise questions about the future viability of global educational disparities in the long run. Furthermore, only the finest in terms of talent, funding, and international relationships might be drawn to lower-tier universities.

Universities typically participate in worldwide endeavors, such as recruiting international students, forming international relationships, and creating locations abroad, with the goal to attain world-class status. The growing number of global college rankings, which might motivate academics to become more formidable rivals on the international scene, supports this trend towards globalization.

The university's rank has an enormous effect on the educational organizations that provide higher education. They affect the institution's strategies, the allocation of resources, the

attraction of instructors, and the patterns regarding pupil enrollment. Universities often allocate significant resources to enhance their standing in various rankings. The competition has come across assault for potentially fostering strategic behaviour that is not necessarily in line with its primary objective of universities.

Global university rankings impact educational institutions in a big way. They help with a lot of things, like institutional goals, resource allocation, faculty recruitment, and enrollment patterns. Universities frequently engage in a "rankings race" to determine who can spend the most sums of money to raise their rankings, according to (Shahjahan et al., 2022), undergraduates are encouraged to take initiative by the competition, which has an impact on the system of higher learning.

The higher education system has a big influence on the atmosphere in which universities fight to become globally recognized. Every nation has its own unique higher education frameworks and approaches, and these factors all influence how the institutions of society have developed throughout time. Given the degree of organization in some of these systems, the regulations of the board of directors directly impact the strategic goals and allocation of funds among universities. Some have more distributed operations, giving institutions greater freedom to become recognized internationally.

The "Excellence Initiative," which initially took effect in Europe, is an excellent demonstration of how government action may serve as an incentive for change within the framework of the higher education system. Policies implemented by leaders have significant effects on the development of ranking strategies as well as the establishment of world-class educational institutions. Several national governments have created plans and funding sources to promote the formation of and advances in developing outstanding institutions. According to

(Lee & Naidoo, 2020), multiple countries base choices on the allocation of resources and funding for universities on the rankings results, which promotes educational institutions to work towards improving their standing.

There have been several meetings and disagreements over how global institutional ranking systems affect the quality of education provided by institutions of higher learning. According to (Hazelkorn & Mihut, 2021), even though the primary goal of these ranking systems at universities is to evaluate research productivity, academic status, and other factors as well, they may also unintentionally affect teaching behaviors and priorities. Higher education institutions may prioritize hiring instructors with exceptional academic credentials in order to improve their rankings. While this might lead to an increase in the amount of researchers, it might also lead to the hiring of educators who lack the necessary zeal or classroom experience, which could have an impact on the standard of instruction.

In the past, internationalization, academic authority, and research output have consistently been provided the greatest importance in worldwide university ranking systems, which has led to a decrease in understanding of universities' social impact. According to (King, 2013), the influence on society may vary greatly amongst cultures and geographical areas. These differences may need to be appropriately considered, or local contributions to the community may need to be carefully assessed using a standardized global ranking methodology. Many ranking systems evaluate research's academic and commercial impacts primarily, ignoring the research's broader social impact. Universities play a major role in helping to solve real-life issues like social exclusion, sustainability, and economic growth, which are rarely considered in ranking systems.

Global ranking techniques have typically placed a significant value on internationalization, academic production, and academic standing. According to (Deem & Brehony, 2005), people assert that these specifications have led to an inadequate representation of the community influence of universities, including the academic contributions to the management of global concerns like economic development, social inequality, and long-term viability. There has been an urge for more broad and beneficial ranking systems that account for university employees' wider societal responsibilities due to the insufficient emphasis on social influence.

One important factor in determining a university's standing as a world-class institution is the Peer Review Process. Peer review processes are an integral part of around the globe ranking systems, wherein professionals assess colleges according to established requirements. A qualitative evaluation of universities is made possible by this method, which frequently takes into consideration variables like international collaboration, research quality, and academic prestige. When it comes to assessing and identifying top colleges in the framework of international ranking systems, the Peer Review Procedure is essential. Expert evaluation and subjective review characterize the process, which is a beneficial supplement to the quantitative measures typically seen in rankings. According to (Hazelkorn, 2015), Investigation, instruction, and societal impact are essential components of world-class universities, and the Peer Review Process emphasizes the significance of research excellence in these areas. The evaluation of academic reputable standing is one of the primary objectives of the procedure for peer review. Peers assess the credibility of an institution within the academic community by considering its global influence, research output, and competence of faculty. A university's

standing as a highest-ranking institution can be greatly improved by favorable feedback from peers.

An essential component of appreciating the modern environment of higher education is the interaction between elite universities and ranking systems. Ranking systems receive a lot of attention for their shortcomings and possible negative impacts, even yet they offer useful instruments to assess colleges internationally. The drive to become world-class has far-reaching effects on universities, contributing to globalization and shaping public policy. In order to improve the integrity and influence of educational institutions in a global community that is becoming more interconnected, players in the domain of college and university education must understand ever-evolving relationship.

#### **4.17 Impact of Ranking Systems on Higher Education**

There prevails no consensus regarding ways of measuring academic quality. As a result, one needs to make sense of the several rankings efforts (Marginson and Wende, 2007). In addition, researchers' concern with respect to the constancy of rankings asserts that myth as well as institutional insights might have a lot to do with the rankings as the techniques employed for determining them (Liu and Cheng, 2005). In actuality, the techniques for evaluating quality mirror a unfairness towards institutional size, the number of "star" faculty and student test scores (Liu and Cheng, 2005). The researchers question this description of quality, for the reason that it has nothing to do with respect to the student's college learning or experience (Dill and Soo, 2005). Secondly, it has been observed that raters are unfair based upon their own knowledge and affiliations about institutions. It is highly debated that if the rankings would be the same with diverse raters (Marginson, 2007). Thirdly, it is asserted that there prevails a halo effect (Liu and

Cheng, 2005). For instance, one extremely ranked department at some university or college might offer adequate glow for allowing other divisions at that institute for being more highly ranked as compared to is warranted. Fourthly, the timing of evaluations might impact the outcome (Marginson and Wende, 2007). In case if studies are carried out closely, then the outcomes of one might impact the raters' opinions for the second. Further, in case if the studies aren't carried out recurrently, in that case the standing ranking might not mirror modifications within the department, bad or good (Marginson, 2007). Further, the application of diverse kinds of methodologies makes evaluations amid reports difficult.

Moving ahead, other criticism associated with rankings is the fact that colleges modify their own procedures and processes for attempting to improve their rankings (Marginson and Wende, 2007). The colleges do this for the reason that it is highly considered that high rankings constructively impact admissions. Moreover, highly ranked colleges/schools have observed a rise in the overall student applications, an increase in the average SAT scores of students coming in and lesser need for financial aid offers for attracting students (Marginson, 2007). Thus, for instance, the approach of early acceptance that commits early candidates, who are likely to be good achievers for attending an institution in case if acknowledged, distorts selectivity as well as yield figures (i.e., the proportion of admitted students who essentially accept admission offers).

However, the impacts of rankings are not restricted to just admissions. Moreover, the college administrators make use of the information for making decisions related to resource distributions (Marginson and Wende, 2007). As a result, the pressure is placed upon for programs for doing well, thus departments might involve in manipulating their reporting for improving their placement on the college list. For instance, the administrators at Cornell University removed students who had never graduated from their alumni lists "prior to calculating the portion of

alumni who made contribution towards the university (Marginson, 2007). Such modification enhanced Cornell's reported alumni offering rate, an element employed for assessing quality. Still, not every adaptation is considered as being a negative. It is considered as being a virtue when colleges enhance their facilities in an attempt of improving their overall rankings. For instance, the administrators at Texas A&M University recognize that they make use of the rankings for spurring modifications, like class size, with an objective of being positioned as top-ten University (Marginson and Wende, 2007).

Additionally, fundamental to high level of criticism is the fact that the present rankings don't take into consideration student learning during their evaluation of a college (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Thus, a substitute of the *U.S. News as well as World Report* rankings has been devised. Moreover, this National Survey of Student Engagement makes an effort of measuring student learning and contentment. It intends to develop "national benchmarks of sound educational procedures" (Marginson, 2007). Further, the academic quality rankings, in spite of all their shortcomings, have been quite effective, from their starting, in offering highly accurate data related to the comparative quality of colleges, universities, along with individual divisions and professional segments of study as compared to any other source (Marginson, 2007). Families have started depending upon research studies for making their college-choice decisions, thus college rankings are most expected to continue.

With respect to sales along with the focus they attain, college rankings have become highly popular. Nevertheless, they have also never gained such high criticism like they do at present. College administrators are few among the highly vocal opponents of college rankings. They allege magazines as well as newspapers for padding their sales through generating college rankings (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Additionally, Americans and individuals in general, hold



a remarkable appetite for leading-10 and best-of lists. Professors and administrators also assert that rankings are integrally oversimplified and unfair, by making use of a simple letter grade or numerical score for representing a school's significance. Few administrators also protest that they are enforced for doing work for the ranking entities through making available all the information (Dill and Soo, 2005).

The ranking system encourages few colleges for spending high amount of money towards areas, which would enhance rankings nevertheless not essentially the quality of education offered (Marginson, 2007). As a consequence of this and the recurrent usage of rankings within marketing materials few now-critical schools have been accused for hypocrisy. Several among these schools/colleges have reacted by pledging not to make use of U.S. News' rankings like a promotional tool (Liu and Liu, 2005). Moving ahead, other issue is the manner in which information is utilized. Few criteria seem overstated and are unclear illustration of what actually makes a bad or good college experience (Marginson and Wende, 2007). One often employed example is the **alumni-offering** rate that could be significant to a school's capability of erecting new buildings or hiring prominent instructors nevertheless might not hold high effect upon the general quality of education, which the college could provide (Marginson and Wende, 2007).

Taking a step ahead, no piece of information is as contentious or regarded as biased as U.S. News' **peer assessment** survey. Around 25% of a school's overall score arrives from this survey wherein a school's top three superintendents rate their peer institutes from one to five (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Opponents assert that with various hundred schools within the United States News rankings, administrators are positioned in a situation for scoring schools, which they might not be acquainted with, thus twisting the ranking system (Liu and Liu, 2005). Even though, there is the "don't know" choice, colleges might be rated by irrelevant or incomplete

data or just on hearsay (Dill and Soo, 2005). For some, the complete concept of rankings is flawed. Opponents assert that rankings involve generalization of a college's worth (Liu and Liu, 2005). Ranking basically provides the impression that just a specific group of colleges matter the most (Marginson and Wende, 2007). The colleges are basically ranked on tiers, and a tier three or four ranking could highly affect the way how a college is seen in the eyes of a likely student. Also, rankings appear to lay focus upon private schools when, in actuality, 75% of college graduates complete their graduation from public schools (Marginson, 2007). According to Marginson (2007), this percentage is representative of students in America who attend public schools; thus there is a high chance that the overly focus on ranking system on the private sector may be biased in their approach to rankings.

Further, the college counsellors show high apprehension that rankings overlook the schools' diversity. Not every individual is suitable to the same college and each year, they call attention to, students who could enter thought top-10 school rather than choosing to attend school somewhere else (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Moreover, this can greatly be due to the fact that they desire a small liberal arts college, large community of a state school and lower tuition. Others might look for a college that is completely concentrated upon undergraduates, prospects for doing investigation with graduate students or educate with particular experts (Marginson and Wende, 2007). School counsellors assert that rankings neither make such significant differences nor display the array of extracurricular alternatives or dedicated academic initiatives available.

Ranking entails a variety of methodologies for evaluating and assessing a university and its students' performance. Because each methodology has its own set of parameters that are incompatible with other ranking parameters, the ranking reports are ambiguous. As it is observed

that rankings attract students to apply to top-ranked institutions, higher education institutions modify their own rules and procedures to enhance their rankings (Marginson and Wende, 2007). The college administration also manipulates their reporting to improve their position on the college list by using the ranking system for resource distribution. It can be demonstrated in the above example where Cornell University removed students from their alumni list (Marginson, 2007).

These rankings have gained a lot of traction, and students and families are using them to help them make decisions about where to enrol. However, this factor is allegedly manipulated for commercial gain as some colleges are accused of padding newspapers to generate their college rankings (Marginson and Wende, 2007). As a result, the ranking is regarded as a flawed process in which some assertions are made based on incomplete or irrelevant data, and it focuses on the private sector ranking, implying that it is biased. Rankings, according to Jelena Brankovic (2021), are zero-sum games that are created artificially. It is artificial because it imposes a strict hierarchy on universities, as well as the fact that it is unrealistic to expect a university to solely improve its reputation for performance at the expense of other universities.

#### **4.18 Further developments of global rankings**

Since that time the overall number of HERS has increased significantly. Nevertheless, the three leading or highly significant HERS are generally recognised as the THE (Times Higher Education) world university rankings, QS (the Quacquarelli-Symonds) rankings as well as ARWU (the Academic Ranking of World Universities). (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Being the outcome of an globally recognized news corporation, the QS/THE ranking also enticed considerable attention globally at the time of original publication during the year 2004 (Hägg and

Wedlin, 2013). Moreover, there were several other university ranking systems as well being developed subsequent to these actual exercises. For instance, during the year 2004, the Cybermetric Lab of the Spanish National Research Council within Madrid printed the World Universities' Webometrics Ranking, a professional ranking initiative concentrated towards the online existence and effect of institutes (Jarocka, 2015). During the year 2007, the government of Taiwan commissioned academics at the University of National Taiwan for producing HEEACT (The Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan) ranking that included an additional progress of the ARWU approach (Harvey, 2008). During the same year, Mines Paris Tech introduced the World Universities' Professional Ranking making use of an extensively diverse strategy, grounded only upon the overall number of graduates turning out to be CEOs or top executives within the Fortune Global 500 corporations (Brooks, 2015).

Moving ahead, the Leiden ranking developed through the Centre for Science and Technology Studies at University of Leiden within the Netherlands employed completely bibliometric indicators, while the European Commission's U-Mutlirank rates institutions in a set array of subjects on several measures making use of information submitted through institutional contributors (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). Also, there are sub-institutional rankings that contrast one feature or sphere, having alike features of other institutions. Such features are frequently professional schools like business, medicine and law (Jarocka, 2015). Further, the table below throws light upon several ranking systems along with their exact dates of foundation.

#### 4.19 Ranking Systems adopted by universities

There are several global university rankings, with the highly-renowned being the **QS World University Rankings**, ARWU (the **Academic Ranking of World Universities**) and **Times Higher Education World University Rankings** (Marginson, 2007). Each one of them makes use of diverse approach. The below sections provided greater insight of different ranking systems.

##### **QS World University Rankings**

The QS World University Rankings basically evaluates universities on six different performance scale, associated with research, teaching and lastly, internationalization. For being qualified for inclusion, institutions need teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and conduct work in at least two of five broad faculty areas (arts and humanities; engineering and technology; social sciences and management; natural sciences; life sciences and medicine) (Jarocka, 2015).

##### **Academic reputation** (around 40% of the total)

Grounded upon a worldwide survey of academics, who are require the identify the leading institutions in their field.

##### **Employer reputation** (10%)

Grounded upon a worldwide survey of graduate staff members who are asked for identifying the universities generating the most excellent graduates within their segment.

##### **Student-to-faculty ratio** (20%)

An indication of commitment to high-quality teaching and support.

**Research citations per faculty member (20%)**

This is normalized via question reguis and mirrors the effect of an university's research.

**Proportion of international faculty (5%)**

A measure of the university success in catching the attention of faculty from globally.

**Proportion of international students (5%)**

A measure of a university accomplishment in catching the focus of students from abroad.

The interactive outcomes table could be completed for showing the scores for every of six indicators, highlighting where exactly every institution's comparative strengths as well as weaknesses exist (Jarocka, 2015).

**Times Higher Education World University Rankings**

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings basically makes use of 13 performance indicators, split into five groups (Harvey, 2008). Universities are not included in case if they fail to teach at undergraduate level, or if the research outcome is lower than a particular threshold.

**Teaching (worth 30% of the overall score)**

Grounded upon a reputation survey (15%), doctorate-to-bachelor's ratio (2.25%), staff-to-student ratio (4.5%), doctorates-awarded-to-academic-staff ratio (6%) as well as institutional income (2.25%).

**Research (30%)**

Grounded upon a reputation survey (18%), research income (6%) as well as research papers published per faculty member (6%).

**Research citations (30%)**

Grounded upon citations a university's research gains, normalized through subject area.

**International outlook (7.5%)**

Grounded upon global-to-domestic-student ratio (2.5%), global-to-domestic-staff ratio (2.5%) as well as global research collaborations (2.5%).

**Industry income (2.5%)**

Grounded upon income acquired from the market, relative to the overall academic employees appointed and adjusted for PPP.

**Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)**

Also extensively termed like the Shanghai Ranking, ARWU (the Academic Ranking of World Universities) evaluates six performance indicators, all associated with research brilliance (Harvey, 2008). The ranking regards all institutes having Nobel Laureates, Fields Medalists, greatly cited investigators, papers printed in Nature or Science, or a noteworthy number of papers indexed through SCIE (the Science Citation Index-Expanded) or SSCI (Social Science Citation Index) (Jarocka, 2015).

**Alumni (worth 10% of the overall score)**

Based upon overall alumni of an institute who has one under Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, with higher weight promoted to more latest recipients.

**Awards (20%)**

Grounded upon the staff affiliated with an institution, who have won Nobel Prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine and economics, and Fields Medals in mathematics, with greater weight given to more recent recipients.

**Highly cited researchers (20%)**

Based upon an institution's number of greatly cited investigators the latest list published by Thomson Reuters.

**Papers in Nature and Science (20%)**

Grounded upon the total papers published within these two influential journals, drawing upon a 4 years time-period. For universities focussed in social sciences as well as humanities, this section doesn't apply (Jarocka, 2015).

**Papers indexed (20%)**

Grounded upon total papers indexed within the Science Citation Index-Extended and Social Science Citation Index during the previous calendar year, having a double weighting for papers indexed within the Social Science Citation Index.

**Per capita performance (10%)**

The weighted scores of other indicators, divided through the aggregate full-time equivalent academic employees.

Moving ahead, there are several different kinds of ranking systems and these include

**Holistic Ranking**

Such generalist rankings basically examine schools with several criteria for creating a standard ranking of "most outstanding" schools (Liu and Cheng, 2005). By making use of an extensive rubric, which examines disparate aspects of a university is basically a bid for



authoritativeness and legitimacy – on the surface, rankings, which measure higher would create a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of university quality in general (Dill and Soo, 2005).

Supposed authoritativeness aside, such rankings are quite prevalent among prospective undergraduates along with their parents as they take into consideration aspects like student contentment, student-faculty ratio, education quality as well as other criteria supposed as being significant indicators of the undergraduate experience quality, that is by no manner only an academic one (Liu and Cheng, 2005). A selectivity of school is frequently employed like a proxy for quality, even in case other traits, like the quality of teachers or average sizes of classroom, could be equally or even more vital (Frank and Cook, 2005).

### **Global Reputation Ranking**

Global reputation rankings are basically the global-oriented versions of the United States News ranking. This is one among the two models of global rankings with another considering research more deeply rather than reputation (Weber, 2008). In both the situations, schools belonging to the West frequently best those from the Rest, for the reason that this ranking is fundamentally elucidations of the historical and structural benefits, which afford higher prestige to institution of higher education within the English-speaking arena and Western Europe (Dill and Soo, 2005). Further, a prestige hierarchy is replicated in a cyclical manner at the time when, for instance, top researchers are attracted towards or wooed through universities already recognized as being prestigious (Frank and Cook, 2005). The historical lineage of the present university to their medieval counterparts within Europe too rather indirectly offers advantage to the standing of European and Anglo colleges (Liu and Cheng, 2005).

### **Research Oriented Rankings**

Just few university evaluators attempt to evade the Anglo-centric and tricky aspect of standing through focusing upon the significance of research carried out at institutions being a principal rankings criterion (Dill and Soo, 2005). This list takes into consideration fewer criteria as compared to the holistic formulations. Even then within such, the old names appear to come to as well as stay on the top every year (Frank and Cook, 2005). Moreover, as it turns out, colleges that are significant are also the ones having the most resources and pulling for drawing in the highest number of leading researchers (Dill and Soo, 2005). Schools within English-speaking and wealthy nations are basically on top proficient of supplying federal funding for huge research ventures along with the college capabilities of producing scholarship within English (Frank and Cook, 2005).

### **Return On Investment (ROI) Rankings**

As the cost associated with attending a four-year college has augmented radically during the latest years, few rankings have decided for capitalizing upon such financial concerns through focusing on the likely costs accrued along with economic value attained through gaining a level from a specific school, instead of the education quality (Liu and Cheng, 2005). In case of the holistic rankings approach undergraduate education like an experience, such rankings focus upon college like an investment, which should generate satisfactory monetary proceeds (Frank and Cook, 2005).

## **Single Issue Rankings**

Rankings, which involve making a statement related to the state of higher education are more expected for being single-issue (Dill and Soo, 2005). This doesn't imply that just one criteria is assessed, nonetheless that all the forces serve for telling the same overview (Liu and Cheng, 2005). They might not even be regarded as being college rankings in the conventional respect, since they don't try to "holistically" assess schools, nevertheless any sortable list could be regarded as a ranking (Frank and Cook, 2005).

## **Graduate School Ranking**

There are continuing efforts for ranking graduate initiatives. The U.S. News rankings for professional colleges, like ones for education, law and medicine, are highly appreciated and engender the type of administrative adaptation along with gaming outlined before (Liu and Cheng, 2005). The rankings of doctoral programs are considered as being a disaster, nevertheless, since they are completely reputation-based and depend upon samples, which are quite small and have extraordinarily high rates of nonresponse that make an already inaccurate science worse (Frank and Cook, 2005).

## **The Carnegie Classification**

The highly authoritative grouping of universities is the Carnegie Classification that has prevailed since the period of 1970s (Dill and Soo, 2005). Informatively, it isn't a ranking, nevertheless an all-inclusive grouping of universities and colleges grounded upon their research as well as teaching goals (Liu and Cheng, 2005). For using California's public higher education system like an example, University of California schools are basically all Doctoral Universities

involving Highest Research University (Dill and Soo, 2005). Although, these are wide classifications, they might be the fairest means of understanding that colleges could regard one another as peers, chiefly for the reason that they are classifications and not rated assessments (Liu and Cheng, 2005).

#### **4.20 University Ranking: Dimensions of Significance in Improving Institutional Position**

Rankings are usually considered in a positive respect through potential students since they are curbing the effort and time that will be needed through collecting and examining the outcomes themselves, particularly since several institutions are unwilling to share particular important figures with the people (Sauder and Espeland, 2006). A multitude of options are present and reliant upon what they are concerned with or what exactly they value, learners could either select a university due to its overall national outcome or because of the standing of a specific division or academic specialism (Astin, 2004). The occurrence of internationalisation has led to a rise in the number of scholarships abroad and locally and has been a reward for forming global company like multidisciplinary research panels (Perna, 2006). Internationalization in this context refers to the process whereby education is tailored to meet the individualistic needs and interest of each higher education entity. Thus, higher facilities for global learners have been developed, like volunteer reception facilities and teaching assistant tutoring systems (to meet the individual needs and interest of HE), even though it is still to be decided in case if it is a straight source of rankings or not (Dale and Krueger, 2002).

Negative impacts associated with rankings could to be witnessed. With the rankings' focus presently being directed from rates of admission towards effective rates of graduation (as decided through the suitable time-period), few students are being impacted, chiefly ones who belong to disadvantaged groups; this involves nonetheless is not restricted to people from ethnic minorities,

low socio-economic backdrops and mature learners whose living environments might interrupt their usual study ways (Vettoreto, 2024). In effect, the institutions are compelled for lowering the overall numbers for these candidates, discontinuing night time initiatives and having stricter policies towards open enrolment guidelines (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Restricted funding has resulted in the rise in tuition fees that, in spite of being the reasonable option, further impact student affordability and accessibility. As a result, countries (particularly developing ones) turn out with staff members lacking the essential skills required on the job marketplace.

With respect to investors along with other stakeholders, a sound standing in rankings too entices outside investments and forces colleges to look for new sources of finance, particularly with respect to privately held HEIs that generally function with capital gained through tuition fees. As a result, the majority of funds are focused towards leading institutes that already hold huge assets and which hold the authority and status for attracting new investors. Within few situations, the level of outside bequests matters less as compared to a university's capability of attracting and retaining investors. Moreover, the ranking carried out by the United States News for instance, considers the beginning of donations (chiefly from alumni students) with indifference to the amounts also.

Teachers appear being influenced not only through the dwindling likelihoods but also through the pressure, which is being placed upon them through the institution's leadership as well as local governments. Those engaged in research are presently pushed for publishing greater material while augmenting its quality as well as also carrying out the remaining job requirements. In the meantime, in institutes less focused towards research, teachers are handling revised along with ever modifying curricula and an expectance of instruction brilliance. As a result, their inputs perk up while their incentives (job security and financially wise) are declining.

There is no doubt in the fact that in the present day having a good ranking greatly affects the success of every university (Altbach, 2015). As a result, the universities all over the world are taking into consideration several strategies to improve their ranking (Liu and Cheng, 2005). Further, the below sections provide great insight of the strategies adopted by the universities in the present day to further enhance their ranking.

### **1- Focus on Quality Research**

Frey & Rost (2010) argue that rankings have become important markers of a university's scientific value, and they influence individual scientists' careers to a great extent. However, such rankings do not accurately reflect the quality of research, which should be the focus of any higher education. Vernon et al. (2018) further highlight that concerns regarding research repeatability and impact have prompted measures to ameliorate the situation. University ranking systems now in use analyze and compare universities based on academic and research performance metrics. Although rating systems are frequently beneficial for commercial objectives, their value in evaluating quality is debatable. There is no single ranking method that provides accurate assessment of research quality. Future efforts should focus on developing comprehensive and standardized measures for measuring university research performance so as to correctly reflect the quality of research in HE.

A critical examination of what constitutes "excellent" research is critically needed in the academic world. While there is no uniform metric for evaluating research quality across fields, geographies, or cultures, this does not negate the importance of the issue. On the contrary, whenever research is undertaken, the problem of acceptable criteria for judging research quality ought to be on the agenda.

Research identifies, clarifies, and assesses new knowledge, concepts, and technologies that are crucial to society's and humanity's future success. A relevant and up-to-date curriculum is impossible to achieve without research. Faculty quality is cultivated through research, which is essential for providing excellent education. When students and teachers participate in research, with the intentional process and demand for critical thinking abilities, they improve because they are better equipped to solve problems and take advantages of possibilities that lie ahead. Research helps make a difference that is open to anyone and thrives on a variety of approaches and perspectives. Research works have significant economic, sociological, and environmental implications on a regional, national, and international level. Outside of the classroom, research provides students with a variety of possibilities to broaden their knowledge and skills. Students can conduct their own research in a variety of fields such as science, medicine, and the social sciences. It's no accident that the top-ranking universities and colleges dedicate sizeable funds for quality research thus any HE looking to explore ways of boosting ranking may consider increasing the budget of research funding for teachers and students alike.

## **2- Hire more prestigious professors**

It's recommended that management keeps an eye on the best academicians in the industry and hire them as part of their dedication to improving the educational system. Hiring the best hands increases the HEs ranking as well as the institution's reputation as a higher education institution. Ranking methodologies considers the accomplishments of these academicians, the number of doctorate degrees, and the quantity and quality of their published articles. Having a well-known scholar or leader as a dean or head of college can also attract other experts in the field. Students, faculty, and academic communities would like to engage with those who have

already had a significant influence in a related field of study. While prestigious colleges, with their vast resources and rigorous courses, undoubtedly produce excellent professors, the evidence suggests that faculty hiring is not a straightforward meritocracy. Professors are produced in significantly greater numbers at top colleges than at even somewhat less distinguished schools (Clauset et al., 2015). In history, for example, the top ten colleges create three times the number of future professors as the colleges ranked 11 through 20 (Clauset et al., 2015).

One theory for this unbalanced hiring structure is that lower-ranking organizations are attempting to replicate their higher-ranking counterparts. The simplest method for a university to improve its reputation is to hire graduates from top schools, so importing some of what made these schools elite in the first place while also indicating to potential students and staff that you attract high talent. Another explanation could be that colleges find it difficult to judge job applicants solely on their merits, as merit is difficult to define and measure. A professor may work at the same institution for 40 years under the tenure system. When it comes to tenure-track posts, however, institutions frequently have to make educated guesses about long-term productivity based on only a few years of experience. Hiring academics is thus a high-stakes decision; though you can always refuse tenure, doing so means you've squandered years nurturing talent you don't want. With so much uncertainty in the process, it may be tempting to go for what appears to be a safe bet.

### **3- Increase and Encourage International Collaborations with others**

With unrestricted communication channels and low-cost travel, the rate of internationalization is fast increasing across the world. Universities all across the globe are already forging global alliances and cultivating links with other schools to take advantage of the



opportunities this brings. It's no wonder that one out of every five scientific publications published in the globe is co-authored by different people from all over the world (Knobel et al., 2013). It has become easier for academics and researchers to interact with other colleagues, thanks to the proliferation of communication techniques and the accessibility of international travel. This makes the interchange of academic ideas much easier to organize. Academic and scientific success requires the capacity to evaluate, discuss, and exchange experience. International partnerships assist in facilitating constructive questioning, established viewpoints and ideas, which is crucial to their progress in the academic field.

Such collaborations have made incalculable contributions to academic and scientific advancement and may be implicated in higher ranking. University collaborations provide a wealth of options for both students and faculty. Institutions can provide foreign experiences, such as abroad programs and staff exchanges, in addition to research possibilities and increased cultural understanding. Subsequently, curriculum development and degrees created in partnership with partner universities are beneficial in terms of teaching.

Because building university collaborations is time-consuming, only those that are determined to be long-term viable should be pursued for higher rankings. Successful connections take time to build; from knowing each other's organizations' culture and aims to assuring educational compatibility to develop suitable bonds. This is before you consider how changes affecting nations may affect cooperation over time. In light of this, it's critical to ensure that any university collaborations can adapt and thrive in changing conditions. According to research, the best method to build these connections is to take a personal approach with the finest assets; the employees (Knobel et al., 2013).

Staff working relationships, are the best way to create connections through via a number of processes such academic activities and scheduled meetings. Whatever approach is utilized, an alliance that focuses on ideas are the most crucial feature of a partnership's long-term viability. This entails carefully selecting which universities to collaborate with and ensuring that all participants of the relationship are on the same page at all times.

#### **4- Improve Graduate Employability**

The capacity of students to find work within a year after graduation is an aspect that can be improved with the correct leadership and management strategy. It's no surprise that top-ranked higher education institutions have a high percent of graduate student employment. Although the present labor market climate plays a major role, it is the responsibility of instructors to educate and prepare students for the workplace (Tomlinson, 2007). A quality degree is a good start, but it won't guarantee them jobs right after graduation, regrettably. Students require comprehensive career development classes to prepare them with the necessary work ready skills. Institutions may also assess the usefulness and authenticity of these programs by establishing a system to keep in touch with alumni. Why not directly implicated in increased HE ranking, institutions with high rate of graduate student employability are known to retain and attract the best talents in various fields of study.

Many institutions are increasingly including questions or subjects related to employment in materials used in class sessions. These are undoubtedly important for identifying core areas of deficiencies; for example, students may remark that giving presentations is a tough skill for them, prompting the search for resources to help them get better at presentation is good. Key skill tests,

that ensures they have updated CVs, builds confidence, and participation in relevant organizations are all areas that can be incorporated into course material.

Individual or group inquiry or problem-based learning can also address crucial aspects of employability in HE. This may be tailored to incorporate teamwork, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership and project management experience – all of which are talents that employers say they want graduates to have (Chhinzer & Russo, 2018). In certain circumstances, the results of these learning experiences might be highly valued in a student's portfolio, demonstrating both what they know and what they can do.

#### **5- Collaboration and engagement**

It has been observed that a noteworthy fraction of the ranking weighting arises from the way how a university is perceived in terms of academic standing, the number of research citations it has generated and employer reputation (Dill and Soo, 2005). As a result, it makes sense that for improving the university ranking, the universities have started developing a stronger standing for the university brand (Altbach, 2015). Moreover, collaborating with other institutes and engaging with ones operating in the sector is seen as being an important approach for exposing the university towards the much-required global focus (Marginson, 2007). The brand strategy of the university should also involve enhancing the involvement levels. In higher education, developing a sense of belonging is highly essential for the students. The university must not overlook the need that is building relations with employees as well as administrators – not only with the peers. This is quite essential and simple. Moreover, students go through higher education being a platform for improving on specific abilities and fundamentally, enhance their employer status. They require the reassurance that the study destination they select could equip them for this. The

academic reputation of the university would be a deciding force during the decision forming.

Further, collaboration and engagement with social causes could help the university in creating a sound image in the mind of the students and their parents. They would consider such university as being highly responsive towards the society and the environment.

## **6- Developing university brand**

For increasing the university ranking and attracting higher number of global students, the universities are working towards having well-established brand recognition (Harvey, 2008). This can take in simple things like ensuring that the university website is live as well as up to date with appropriate and right information (Marginson, 2007). For improving the international position like a reputable university, the universities very well understand that they need to first build their university brand as being distinguishable (Merisotis, 2012). Additionally, it is also quite significant to obtain student opinion for improving the university reputation. For doing so, universities are considered as being a good option. One could effectively put forward a number of questions, which offer a wealth of valuable information. This would also greatly help in having high respondents rate. Universities are taking into consideration the same aspects for the purpose of meta-analysis. Further, the repeat functionality of surveys, signify a simple and well-organized means of gathering student outlook as well as enable the enhancement of institution's overall standing. In such a situation it is highly suggested for the universities to prioritize the student experience along with academic offerings. It is also highly important for the universities to keep the curricula updated for the purpose of reflecting the altering market and dynamics associated with the higher education. Further, it is also worth taking into account the increasing effect of globalization. Not just has this resulted in new academic subjects nevertheless universities need to

also accommodate for non-traditional learners along with older students populace. For the purpose of strengthening brand positioning as well as reputation, the business school or university needs to make every possible effort for successfully managing such modifications.

### **7- Improve brand Image via Community engagement and communication**

Universities can only provide physical information to prospective students, such as rankings and data about academic programs, but they can't completely convey their overall value propositions. However, studies suggest that prospective students consider both concrete and intangible aspects when deciding which institution to attend, such as institution brand image and personal preferences (Foroudi et al., 2019). Universities have increased their integrated marketing tactics to strengthen branding and promotional activities, since intangible characteristics are influential with prospective students.

Brand image has been a key marketing metric that is "both a concrete and an abstract in representation." Consumer views and connections from their memories are reflected in brand image in the classic marketing sense. Brand image is defined as "the total impressions an entity produces on the minds of others" or "the sum of overall impressions" in the widest sense (Patterson, 1999). In general, it is mostly subjective, influenced by both marketing efforts and the consumer's background and beliefs. Studies have identified distinct elements of university brand image that shown brand image is a complicated construct that may be difficult to assess.

When prospective students have limited information, it is the university's capacity to separate itself from rival schools that will guide their decision-making processes. As a result, an institution with a great brand image may elicit good sensations, simplifying a difficult choice such as the college selection process in its favor (Panda et al., 2019). As a result, universities need

place a greater emphasis on developing their brand images through community participation and communication.

### **8- Diversify the staff**

While building and supporting a diverse student body has been a top concern for colleges and universities in recent years, many are now focusing on cultivating a diverse faculty to meet the shifting student demographics. Schools can foster better performance among groups that have traditionally been underrepresented on campus by developing a diverse faculty (Boulton, 2011). When students see themselves mirrored in the makeup of the HE faculty, they are typically inspired to strive for better levels of achievement, which may directly or indirectly enhance rankings as more students choose higher academic excellence.

Given the apparent benefits of a diverse campus, schools can adopt a variety of strategies. These include reconsidering employment policies in light of diversity, considering advertising open positions in more areas so that the institution may recruit from a larger pool of applicants. To lessen the probability of unconscious biases playing a part in hiring decisions, management can delete identifying information from resumes once they've been gathered. Provide education and training to assist employees and faculty in creating a workplace that attracts and retain more diverse candidates. Working with consultants to assess current school policies for any unintentionally biased systems because if minority faculty members are consistently overlooked for promotions or tenure, they will most likely seek employment elsewhere.

Given the significance of diversity in these universities' mission statements and the amount of money spent on financial assistance (which significantly exceeds the amount spent on professor salaries at many of these universities), one may argue for a considerable weighting and, as a

result, a change in rankings (Henderson & Herring, 2013). These institutions' main goals are access and equal opportunity, and recognizing their achievements in this area in the rankings is just as vital. The current rankings system provides incentives for resource allocation at schools and universities. (Whether colleges actually shift resources in accordance to these incentives is difficult to establish or deny, but despite claims to the contrary, it appears very plausible that it happens at some institutions). Currently, colleges are not given significant credit in the rankings for financial assistance spending or progress in diversifying their student populations but these factors can help improve the perceived value of an institution.

#### **9- Offering higher courses in English**

Universities very well understand the fact that augmenting the number of courses offered in English could eventually considerably enhance the university ranking (Jarocka, 2015). Moreover, the overall number of international students as well as international employees; are both likely to perk up radically, improving performance on the 'internationalization' ranking indicators, at the same time also feeding into the worldwide standing (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013). It has been observed that universities offering higher number of English courses are preferred more than universities that offer lesser range of English courses. The students are of the view that universities offering higher number of English courses are quite well-off and would certainly offer them high growth prospects in the future also.

#### **10- Improve the Experiences of Students**

Universities are people-oriented institutions that are administered by and for people. Their outputs and outcomes are reliant on the pleasant experiences of students and staff on a daily basis.

However, this notion frequently clashes with more traditional notions of authority, such as the role HE play to enforce academic excellence. In an increasingly competitive global context, HEs must prioritize student experience more than even before if they are to maintain current ranking or improve their ranking. From an early age, students have been pushed to act as customers, and they have grown to expect a high level of service in exchange for their participation in the institution. They're used to marketing brands seeking to develop and maintain relationships, even when no money is exchanged. Students understand that they cannot be passive and must be responsible for their achievements, but they increasingly expect to be partners rather than subordinates in the process.

The higher education market has gotten more competitive with more demanding students that are knowledgeable about the services and assistance they should anticipate while at a university. As a result, in order to ensure continuous survival, schools must deliver a high-quality student experience. Commitment to improving the student experience can help students stay in school longer by lowering withdrawal rates and allowing them to advance. It is also critical to the ability of HE to attract students. Treating students entering the first level of study as a homogeneous group is no longer acceptable, if it ever was (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). Because of the growing diversity of students, rising expenses of providing higher education, reduced government/state financing, and resource limits, it is imperative that excellent quality student experiences are provided by the institution (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). It's no wonder that the top ranking institutions have focus on improving student experience.

The HE dedication to providing students with the resources and assistance they require to succeed is important to the long-term success of each student (Clarke, 2007). A majority of students attend college in order to pursue a rewarding career so institutions must present students



with pertinent labor market data early on in their college careers, such as rising employment sectors, in-demand skills, and educational needs for certain occupations. Students should also be informed about the job options linked with each major, and they should be introduced to alumni who have graduated with those majors. In addition, schools may provide pre-professional coaching and activities to better prepare students for advanced education or the job market, as well as skills workshops to help students build high-demand abilities. All these activities enhance the reputation of HE institutions.

#### **11- Attend international conferences**

Whether the university is collaborating globally or not, being part of the international conferences is seen as being an effective means for ensuring sound ranking among universities (Liu and Cheng, 2005). This is considered as not just as an opportunity for learning from other universities worldwide with respect to academic research, recruitment, and marketing conferences are employed by universities for creating international links and nurture relations, which could result in ultimate collaboration (Altbach, 2015). Moreover, international conferences offer universities great exposure and a chance to understand how renowned universities worldwide are operating and have been so effective in attaining such high ranking. The international conferences would also enable the universities to have in place highly competent and knowledgeable teachers in the best possible manner.

#### **12- Us a hiring panel to control Quality**

As HEs learn more about how damaging a bad hire can be to an institution, it's important that the hiring panels are composed of competent hands. Panel interviews are a type of job

interview in which a candidate answers questions from a group of individuals who then collaborate to make a hiring decision. Each panel member adds a unique collection of experiences, and opinions to the process to ensure it is properly conducted. Members are not afraid to politely criticize each other's assessments on the choice since their strengths compensate for one other's limitations.

Evidently, staff recruitment and replacement is costly. Recruitment expenses include loss of productivity, training, and the new employee's start-up expenses. Because formal interview panels are used in most academic recruiting procedures, a well-functioning interview panel is critical in selecting the correct candidate. Poor hiring decisions may cost institutions significantly more in terms of human and financial resources than just the expense of replacing workers, and they can also harm the HE's image. Maintaining and recruiting highly efficient staff members, though not directly implicated in the ranking of institutions, can help promote an atmosphere of competency that is in line with the improvement and developmental goals of the institution.

### **13- Invest in Human Capital**

Higher Education institutions must use their workers' talents, knowledge, and experience to prosper in today's competitive environment. In both the commercial and governmental sectors, research suggests that investing in human capital improves organizational performance, team effectiveness, retention, and creativity and may as well lead to increased ranking among others (Andersson & Konrad, 2003; Blundell et al., 2005). In other words, HEs that prioritize hiring, investing in professional development opportunities, and cultivating pleasant workplace cultures tend to be more efficient and provide better results than those who don't.

Organizations must apply these tried-and-true tactics while still being dynamic in order to establish effective human capital systems. Management must adapt to changing landscapes: labor market developments, new technology, and evolving communication techniques all to necessitate a rethinking of how they attract, train, and keep their people. A huge percent of job searchers utilize the internet to search for or apply for a new job in the last two years—tools that were not available in previous decades.

Many business and public sector organizations understand that, just as innovation changes the nature of their job, technology also have an impact on their human capital systems. In order to attract, develop, and retain exceptional talent, several institutions have updated their recruiting and professional development methods. While there are several methods for developing top talent, many HE institutions with excellent human capital management systems use the same best practices. They seek top talent through smart recruiting methods that use focused outreach and technology to engage top applicants. They also create selection processes that assess candidates in key job functions. Effective institutions develop pleasant workplace environments, reward their workers at competitive levels, while providing avenues for professional advancement which guarantees that applicants flourish and progress inside the institution. Many successful high ranking institutions are known to design particular tactics to attract and assist people from varied backgrounds in addition to an overall human capital structure with specialized techniques for attracting and supporting candidates from a variety of backgrounds (Andersson & Konrad, 2003).

#### **14- Pick Competent Board members**

While this may not directly affect the ranking of a Higher education, it those contribute to providing the right direction for the institution which may translate to higher rankings in the

future. Much of the discussion on effective governance in HE focuses on what boards do as a group, which is a good thing, however, the effective boards are those whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Boards are made up of persons that work together (Brown, 2007). While governors normally appoint trustees to HEs, private or independent schools are frequently staffed with current board members nominating new members. Other HEs have representatives like students, professors, religious order members, and alumni, and so accept nominations from others.

People join boards for various purposes and with various levels of experiences, regardless of the selection procedure. While some may have never served in that capacity, others have may have belonged to other boards with acquired experiences. In some notable instances, trustees serve to "give back," while others serve for more personal gains or political motives.

The bottom line is that many trustees arrive at the board table having received no formal board training, and with little idea of what to anticipate, and having little comprehension of what is required of them. Thus, an orientation for incoming trustees is critical. Orientations are frequently rushed and incomplete, if they are done at all. Effective orientations should give new board trustees an overview of the university or system, including budget, risk, mission, and values; it should educate them in the capacity in which they are to govern (Brown, 2007). It should also afford them the opportunity to become effective board members as they grow into the culture of the system.

#### **4.21 Conclusions**

This research aims at addressing the ranking system deployed by various institutions to place universities on various levels of competence. The researcher highlights the importance of globalization and internationalization to the present Higher educational system and the impact

these two forces have in rankings. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the various ranking systems used in Higher education was given. Many of the ranking system identified are used to highlight the quality of institutions along with the core programs within those institutions that make them rank above others. Some of the identified ranking systems in this research include, the QS world university ranking that evaluates universities on six different performance scales, the times HE world university rankings that utilizes 13 different indicators, the ARWU that employs six different indicators, and other holistic ranking system that deploy a number of strategies to rate universities and higher education systems. Other aspects associated with ranking systems were also addressed. These include global reputation ranking system, research oriented ranking system, and graduate school ranking amongst others.

In light of the need for institutions to improve the rankings, the researcher also suggests innovative approaches that can be employed by management. Among others, increased international collaborations, diversity, offering courses in multiple languages, increased funding initiatives for research as well as developing university brands were highlighted.

## Research Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

In designing a research project, researchers purposefully seek and adopt research methodologies. Methodologies guide researchers in determining the procedures and processes that are suitable for completing their investigations (Rashid et al,2019). This chapter discusses the methodological commitments and approach taken in this study. This involves a consideration of both epistemology and ontology in developing a coherent research approach, which can then be applied in different forms of research theory (Levers, 2013). In this process, the aim is often to establish a research theory framework that is appropriate and able to explain procedures and processes and help make the research understandable to researchers and participants (Levers, 2013). It is important for a researcher to identify a framework that is suitable for their research because, for example, aspects of some frameworks would be in conflict with others (Sayer, 2004). For example, it would raise some difficult questions when a researcher adopts a subjectivist epistemology and interpretivist paradigm in a survey study. This is because surveys are data collection methods that tend to lean to quantitative study, which goes with the more positivist epistemology (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It is worth stating that while some approaches are in opposition in their assumptions, other approaches may be simply contradictory. According to Sayer (2004), contradiction between theories implies that they have something in common that leads them to contradict each other. Such contradictions have led to polarized debates regarding what could be considered scientific or unscientific research and the approaches or philosophical assumptions underlying them. Thematic theory can be used as an example to illustrate this debate. The philosophical assumptions informing this current study will be discussed under the relevant

subheadings below. This study assumes a critical realist epistemology (Easton, 2010) or “epistemological relativism, essentially the position that all knowledge is fallible, partial, and changeable over time’ (Brundage et, al. 2020).

In addition to deciding on the philosophical position of a study, the researcher also needs to decide on the research design, methods and processes to be adopted. Researchers often choose between two research paradigms known as qualitative and quantitative research designs. These designs will be discussed under the relevant subheading below. Each of these paradigms is generally concerned with a different philosophical position and theoretical perspective (Atieno, 2009). Each of these may be adopted by the researcher depending on the researcher’s aims and the nature of the study being conducted (Smith & Elger, 2014). However, the notion of ‘mixed methods’ study has emerged recently whereby a researcher can design a single study where both qualitative and quantitative methods are considered necessary to be able to offer better insights (Sale et al., 2002). This study is based on a qualitative research approach.

Like research paradigms, researchers also make use of different data types known as primary and secondary data (Church, 2001). Each of these may be used; both of them can also be used together in single research design if both will enable the researcher to address their research aims. This study draws on primary data. Primary data will be defined and the rationale for its choice will be presented, the collection method, population for the study and the data analysis method, which made use of thematic theory, is discussed below.

## 5.2 Research Approach

### *Ontology*

Ontology refers to the ‘study of being’ (Crotty, 1998). It is concerned with the nature of reality (Crotty, 1998). The main ontological debate according to Levers (2013, p.2), is about whether reality exists ‘independent of human consciousness and experience, or reality existing within our consciousness and only through experience’. He further illustrates the debate as being about whether things are in existence out of the human mind or if the views of the world are based on what humans construct from their thought. Within the ontological debate, relativist and critical realist ontologies stand in opposition to each other (Bilgrami, 2002).

Critical realism takes on the stance that reality exists whether it is directly experienceable or comprehensible or not and is independent of human thought (Levers, 2013). Sayer (2004) describes the critical realist philosophy as providing an alternative to positivism, relativism and idealism. However, he argues that almost all the theories of research acknowledge to a certain extent, the existence of reality independent of our mind. Sayer (2004) terms all research theorists ‘minimalist theorists’ for this reason, that is, they all agree that something exists, which we might not be aware of. His position is persuasive because it is the attempt to discover things that exist outside our knowledge that informs research in the first place.

### *Epistemology*

Epistemology refers to the view of the researcher with respect to what constitutes knowledge. There are competing epistemologies, including positivism, pragmatism, realism and interpretivism (Hallebone & Priest, 2009). There are also postpositivist, constructivist (Levers, 2013) and relativist (Sayer, 2004) forms of epistemology. Among these epistemologies, the



current research is more closely related to realism. It is described as closely related because it is form of realism, what is recognised as critical realism. As Sayer (2004) has noted, realism gave birth to critical realism. Thus, critical realism does not feature in Hallebone & Priest's (2009) list, it is associated with realism, which gave birth to this approach. The basic assumption in realism is that 'there is a world which exists largely independently of the researcher's knowledge of it' (Sayer, 2004, p.6). Realism holds that 'the world is the way it is' (Hart, 1999). Irrespective of how we see the world, or how we try to understand things, reality is exactly as it is. In realism, it is argued that an observable phenomenon is capable of providing facts or credible data for research (Hallebone & Priest, 2009). The assumption is that the world is not usually the product of our imagination or thought (Sayer, 2004).

While several epistemologies exist, there are two opposing epistemologies that are often drawn on to explain what is considered oppositional epistemologies and paradigms, positivism and interpretivism. Often, these two are used to discuss how research can be either objectivist or subjectivist. Positivism goes with objectivism while interpretivism is married to subjectivism (Atieno, 2009). Subjectivism is about perceptions, experiences and interpretations, which are seen as personal or individualistic (Mills et al., 2010). In other words, these interpretations are based on the views of the world held by the particular individuals. The experiences may be unique to such individuals, thus, cannot be said to be applicable to numerous other people whose experiences might differ from those provided by the participants. This subjectivist epistemology, for this reason, leads to interpretivism, which is line with subjective experiences and perceptions.

While both constructivist and critical realist scholars can use interviews to collect research data, the difference becomes clear with respect to how the actual data is collected. According to Smith & Elger (2014), interpretivists engage in mutual construction of meanings with their

research participants during interviews, which enables the researcher to gain insights into the participants' subjective understandings of social contexts, social relations and events. For the positivists, on the contrary, this process may be considered as less scientific. Thus, positivists' approach to interviewing tends to lead to the researcher controlling interviews tightly, using standardized questions and structures capable of providing responses that are freer from bias as well as being more replicable (O'Connell Davison, 1994).

Objectivists, on the other hand, 'claims that there is only one fully correct way in which reality can correctly be divided up into objects, properties, and relations' (Hart, 1999). This approach is also called objectivity. Both terms will be used interchangeably in this report. The term objectivity or objectivism are used by scholars in two different senses, which according to Sayer (2000) are often conflated and could lead to negative results. He argues that objectivity exists first in the sense of 'value-freedom' and secondly in the sense of truth-telling or truth-seeking.

Objectivism is often associated with realism by many scholars (see Bunge, 2001; Handler, 2001). This is because in the ongoing debate regarding which epistemologies are scientific or unscientific, realism and objectivism are seen as establishing social reality based on objective data or facts. However, Sayer (2004) has argued that critical realism opposes positivism, and this is due to the former's 'subjectivist conception of values which leads it to view positivism as confusing objectivity in the sense of value-neutrality with objectivity in the sense of truth-seeking' amongst other assumptions it holds that contradict those held by positivism. Critical realism also opposes constructivism, relativism and even realism (Sayer, 2004).

Critical realism has a unique feature, which probably makes it attractive to researchers. Such features are described by Smith & Elger (2014, p.4) as its emphasis on a 'layered ontology

to social reality', which require sensory experience in an empirical form, action in events and real manifestations. There are arguments and counter arguments about which epistemological positions could be used or not used for certain paradigms or approaches. There are currently rules when it comes to determining ontological and epistemological position of a certain research or the paradigm to be adopted in a particular work. This is due to the ongoing debate about rigour, that is, approaches that are said to be rigorous and those said to be less rigorous (see Levers, 2013). Levers observed that positivism was popular and thus, widely accepted at the time Glaser and Strauss (1967) published their work. Levers also observes that qualitative research was then viewed as unscientific and lacking rigour – a view, which Glaser and Strauss endeavoured to challenge at the time. While the debate on rigour continues, it is widely accepted that critical realism aims to achieve rigour to a certain extent due to an effort to base any conclusions on observable facts or scientific data (see Sayer, 2004).

### ***Critical Realism***

The philosophical and methodological decisions in this project are informed by vital realism, which acts as its guiding paradigm. The ontological and epistemological framework of essential realism explores the boundaries of human expertise and the essence of fact. According to its ontological tenets, it stresses the existence of a universe other than people's subjective reviews and perceptions (Muhamad et al, 2019). This view contrasts with relativist ontologies which brings a scepticism as to whether or not truth exists independently of the mind.

This study takes a realist stance by claiming a world outside our direct perception, a global one that may be better understood through experiment and data gathering. An approach that acknowledges the world's truth outside our subjective perceptions and the bounds of human

information (Sayer, 2004). All studies' theories, even the "minimalist theorists" (Kinsella, 2009), agree that there is a global beyond our consciousness that motivates us to seek solutions via investigation. What is expertise? That is the epistemological challenge that critical realists are seeking to address. Its nuanced attitude distinguishes it from realism while staying intently aligned with realism (Yucel, 2018). Critical realism differs from positivism because it does not restrict know-how to empirical information. It argues that even though facts exist independently of the mind, our statements and interpretations of it constantly lead us to have a partial view of truth (Sayer, 2004). One of the main differences between vital realist and positivist viewpoints is the popularity of restrictions on human information.

Improving society through a deeper grasp of reality is vital to critical realism.

Understanding social phenomena and locating methods to make a positive effect are the goals of this kind of study (Ramsarup, 2017). Improving institutional efficacy, overall performance, and knowledge can be the purpose of this critical perspective. It grounds research on the significant cause of creating a good impact on society. Critical realism allows the selection of qualitative studies methods within the framework of the examination design. The focus of essential realism on delving into the depths of human stories and meanings is congruent with qualitative research's intention of knowing the "why" and "how" of social realities (Wiltshire, 2018). In keeping with vital realism's ideals, the emphasis on accumulating and studying qualitative records allows for a detailed examination.

The critical realist stance also encourages an intensive evaluation of language as a device for building expertise while planning observations. Critical research methods like interviews and questionnaires necessitate linguistic interpretation (Armstrong, 2019). In order to get valuable conclusions from the information gathered, it is essential to comprehend the position of language

in the formation of understanding. According to Hood (2016), this realist precept stresses the significance of incorporating language analysis inside the larger framework. The method choice and framework understanding has been guided by critical realism, which emphasizes attempts to discover objective facts while accepting the limitations of human expertise. It extends from ontology to a constructivist epistemology and into the functional components of research design. Importantly, by focusing on social adversity, on an understanding of the critical, such studies align with the typical motive of positively impacting institutional settings and, by extension, society as a whole.

The function of language in critical realism surpasses a passive contribution as it was conceived before; rather, it interacts with the world to both mirror and influence our comprehension of reality. The critical realism of Sims-Schouten et al. (2007) highlights that language is an integral part of the material world, serving the purpose of mediating our interactions and constructing social phenomena. This point of view emphasizes that language is far more than simply a mirror of reality; rather, it actively participates in the building of reality.

As Newman (2020) indicated, critical discourse analysis involves understanding how language tools are used to construct and propagate social structure and power dynamics. Language is intertwined with the ideologies and structures in society, but at the same time, it holds the power of changing and restructuring meaning and structures in society (Bouchard, 2022). Critical realists, through discourse analysis, try to identify the inner processes that enable these social imbalances and asymmetric relationships.

In addition, the critical realist perspective takes into account material conditions in the study of language practices (Bouchard, 2022a). According to Smith (2023), factors that include financial limitations, institutional regulations, and individual experiences all impact the way in

which people and communities make use of the language. These material conditions, therefore, have to be addressed for an improved understanding of how language both mirrors and influences social life. These perspectives are consistent with the approaches by Bouchard (2022b) and May & Perry (2022) in that they emphasize the aspect of social reality that is language. Thus, these researchers highlight the essential place of language, which contributes to shaping social phenomena, and the need to study how language is related to material conditions.

Critical realism is a powerful standpoint for the study of the interconnection between language and reality. Through emphasizing the role of language as a tool shaping social phenomena and, in turn, the influences of material conditions on language practices, critical realism presents valuable foresight towards the consequences of language, society, and the material world.

### **5.3 Research Design**

The idea of research design also called research method, previously noted, including the two opposing paradigms, ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’. Qualitative research seeks to understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ social realities take place while its quantitative counterpart aims to show ‘how much’ of such issues (Smith, 2015). Qualitative research is concerned with meaning-making or how people understand their social world (Willig, 2013).

Quantitative research on the other hand, is defined as research involving ‘the utilization and analysis of numerical data using specific statistical techniques to answer questions like who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and how’ (Apuke, 2017, p.40). As can be seen from this definition, this type of data is also concerned with questions of ‘how’ like its qualitative

counterpart. However, the ‘how’ in quantitative research has to do with numerical data, such as how much of the issue has occurred or how far it has happened.

While both research methods are useful, the current study is based on qualitative design (Bryman, 2008). This is due to the purpose of this study. As previously discussed, quantitative research method focuses on measurement and statistical analysis (Apuke, 2017) but this is not what this current study is concerned with. The current study is exploratory and sought to explore social meanings. The focus of qualitative research method on ‘why’ and ‘how’ of issues (Smith, 2015) stands as one of the reasons for adopting it in this current study.

Qualitative research and qualitative data are in line with the critical realist epistemology adopted in this current researcher. Thus, the use of this research design and data method in this current study can be claimed to be methodologically appropriate. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that qualitative data is not restricted to the critical realist epistemology.

Constructivist and interpretivist researchers focus mostly on qualitative data for their studies (Smith, 2015). While this is noted, quantitative data could not serve the purpose of this study in the limitations it had to work within.

#### **5.4 Research Tools**

Researchers make use of primary data and secondary data (Newman & Benz, 1998). The gathering of primary data tends to define primary research while work on forms of secondary data gives its name to secondary research. Nevertheless, both can be combined in a single study.

Secondary data refers to data used by a researcher who did not collect the data in its original form (Church, 2001). The data can come from different sources like books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, radios and other sources (Church, 2001). On the other hand, primary data are data

from an original source, that is, data gathered first-hand by a researcher for the particular research project (Persaud, 2010). It is original because the data had not been used previously. Primary data can come in the form of interviews, surveys, experiments, and field observations (Persaud, 2010). While both primary and secondary data are useful, primary data has the advantage of its originality (Salkind, 2010). Primary data is used in this current study due to this advantage. The data were expected to offer new insights into the commitment to quality in Saudi Arabi's strategic vision in ways that had not been previously documented. With original data, it is hoped that both researchers and practitioners can consider any current or new undocumented issues in relation to institutional improvement.

Data for qualitative research, according to Polkinghorne (2005), tends to take the form of written or spoken language. Among the data used in qualitative research, interviews are commonplace. Smith & Elger (2014, p.3) consider interviews as 'the commonest method of social research.' They do not mean the commonest for 'qualitative research' but for social research and this demonstrates how popular the interview method is.

Scholars place interviews on different epistemological positions. Smith & Elger (2014), for example, discusses interviews under the critical realist epistemology. There are those who place interviews under subjectivism and constructivism (see Smith, 2015). Nevertheless, the interview used in the current study comes under the critical realist epistemology considering that this particular epistemology is adopted in this research. Irrespective of where scholars place interviews, interviews are considered valid under a critical realist epistemology. Therefore, in order to maintain methodological consistency in this project, it is necessary to place the interview under the particular epistemology adopted and justified for this current study.



The term 'interview', however, can be considered too vague considering that different types of interviews exist. Interviews are often categorised into three types, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). All these three methods collect the same type of qualitative data, but the difference is found in preparation or how the interview questions are framed. Semi-structured interviews are adopted in this current study. Semi-structured interviews makes use a set of questions directed at the research participants in a manner that makes it easy for them to pay attention to the researcher's aims (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).). This is not the case with unstructured interview whereby the participants are allowed to talk about the question more broadly. In unstructured interview, participants' responses are not tailored to a set of questions, rather, they talk about the issue in general from any angle they choose (Mathers et al., 1998). Such an interview is more useful to, for example, a journalist wanting to get full knowledge of an incident or event for news reporting purposes.

Structured interview, on another hand, restrict responses from participants. Structured interview questions are closely related to survey questions within quantitative research methods, which tends to support the positivists' idea of research instrument capable of unbiased and replicable responses as previously discussed. That said, structured interviews were unsuitable for the current study as its restrictive nature meant that it would not provide sufficient space for the research participants to provide more open-ended responses needed to gain adequate knowledge of the subject of research investigation.

The capacity of the semi-structured interview to direct the attention of the research participants to the aims of the study is the rationale for choosing this interview type. The nature of this type of interview means that the participants can be invited to share with researcher their

perceptions and views related to Saudi Arabia's strategic vision for 2030 as a social phenomenon without unnecessary distractions. This also means that the researcher was able to probe their initial answers and seek more details or clarifications.

While interviews are suitable data collection method for this current study, which are placed under the critical realist epistemology, Smith & Elger (2014, p4) have pointed out what could be termed the limitation of interviews under this epistemology. According to them, critical realism takes into account both the mechanisms and structures that generate the 'real' in its name. They argue that while interviews provide an opportunity to gain insights into 'the actual and empirical representations of action,' interviews may not give the actual picture of the real causes of action under investigation. This is understandable because interview data solely depends on what the research participants decide to say or the way they choose to express their thoughts. Thus, the real action may be withheld for some reasons.

### ***Sampling and Population***

Sampling is one of the important research processes for any research involving a population. The researcher selects a sample that will take part in the study, which is 'an integral part of designing sound research' (Fritz & Morgan, 2010). A number of sampling methods are available for researchers to choose from and among them are purposive sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, convenience or opportunistic sampling and case study sampling (Luborsky and Rubinstein, 1995). It is worth noting that some of these sampling methods normally apply to particular research paradigms, such as quantitative and qualitative approaches. The researcher would normally make a choice depending on the research design. As this current study is based on a qualitative design, purposive sampling was chosen as the most suitable

sampling method within the restrictions of time and access. In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks research participants due to the researcher's belief that the participants possess specific knowledge and experience considered as relevant to the topic of research investigation (Barratt et al., 2015). This method is chosen of all the aforementioned sampling methods because it was coherent for the research participants to be selected due to them being specific professionals (Vice Rectors for Planning, Development and Quality) with real experiences in higher education operation and policy both in the UK and Saudi Arabia. The sample was selected from the aforementioned Vice Rectors, because their expertise best aligned with the topic of investigation and access, while difficult, was possible. Participants were interviewed and asked a set of open-ended questions – see Appendix 1. There was a total of ten participants in the study comprising nine men and one woman, eight participants in Saudi Arabia and two in The United Kingdom. There was no requirement set to ensure that both male and female participants were recruited in equal numbers because there was little concern about potential forms bias that could result from an overrepresentation of one gender.

## **5.5 The Pilot Study**

A pilot study, a preliminary investigation conducted before the commencement of the main data gathering effort of a research project, served as a foundational step to assess various aspects of the study's feasibility. Researchers undertake pilot studies to examine factors such as time constraints, costs, potential risks, and possible adverse events. Such small-scale explorations aid in refining research methods and making necessary adjustments, ensuring that any subsequent larger-scale study is well-planned and effectively executed.

The pilot study was conducted through interviewing a leading university officer in Saudi Arabia. By posing the initial questions designed for the study the researcher not only gauged the

feasibility of the chosen methodology but also gained valuable experience in navigating the intricacies of interviewing elite subjects. This experience was beneficial in identifying and addressing any challenges that could arise during interviews, contributing to the minor refinement of the interview protocol. Testing logistical and ethical considerations further enhance the usefulness of undertaking a pilot study. Logistical issues, such as scheduling difficulties or language barriers, may surface during the pilot phase, offering the researcher an opportunity to address these challenges before the main study. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and cultural sensitivities, are crucial aspects that need close attention to uphold the ethical standards required in research.

Moreover, the pilot study provided an avenue for practicing data analysis. The data collected during the pilot interview was subjected to preliminary analysis, offering the researcher insights into the suitability of the analysis approach chosen for the larger study. In essence, the pilot study stood as a vital preparatory step in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the main research project.

## **5.6 Positionality**

My interest in this subject is profoundly rooted in my professional role as a faculty member at a higher education institution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This position, and my professional identity, intimately connects me to the issue of Saudi universities' rankings on an international scale, including, reflexively, (Olmos-Vega, et.al., 2022) my relationships, biases and values. The prospect of expanding and enhancing higher education opportunities within the Kingdom is a matter of great personal and professional significance to me. Consequently, my

commitment to this issue is unwavering, an element of patriotism is influencing my decision to concentrate my research efforts in this area.

Firstly, the global ranking of Saudi universities is not merely a metric of prestige but also a reflection of the quality of education, research output, and academic influence. As a faculty member, I am acutely aware of the impact that improved rankings can have on attracting international students, faculty, and research collaborations. This influx of diverse perspectives and expertise is crucial for fostering an enriched academic environment and for driving innovation within our institutions.

Secondly, higher education institutions serve as pivotal agents of national development. By elevating the standards and global perception of Saudi universities, the sector can contribute to the broader goals of Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on oil revenues. Enhanced university rankings can lead to greater investment in research and development, producing a skilled workforce capable of driving economic growth and technological advancement.

Thirdly, my position allows me to observe firsthand the challenges and opportunities that Saudi universities face in striving for international recognition. Issues such as curriculum development, faculty recruitment, research funding, and student engagement are critical factors that influence rankings. Through my research, I am aiming to identify the strategies that can address these challenges effectively, thereby facilitating continuous improvement in our higher education sector.

Furthermore, my dedication extends to supporting the units responsible for international rankings within Saudi universities. By contributing to their efforts, I hope to play a role in developing robust methodologies and practices that can consistently elevate our institutions'

standings. This includes fostering a culture of academic excellence, promoting impactful research, and encouraging international collaborations.

In summary, my engagement with the challenge of global rankings is driven by a combination of professional duty, national interest, and a commitment to academic excellence. By focusing my research on this area, I hope in some way to contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance the global reputation and quality of Saudi higher education.

## **5.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in social science research vary, nevertheless, the most common ones relate to issues around participants' rights and safety. These issues range from briefing the participants to obtaining informed consent before their participation, avoiding deception or deceit, keeping participants anonymous and their details confidential and dealing with any forms of harms, be it psychological or physical harm (Miller, 2003).

Ethical research demands that the participants be properly informed about their participation in the study, such as the reasons for choosing them as participants and what they should expect from the researcher, including their rights to withdraw their participation at any time (Liebling & Stanko, 2001). Further, in any ethical research, participation must be voluntary and the participants should be supported to freely give or withhold informed consent (Randall and Rouncefield, 2010). There are also other requirements, such as informing them the of duration of their participation in the study. In other words, they need to know how long participation would take place for them to decide whether they are comfortable with the duration or not.

Another ethical aspect is the experience of participants, a concern for their emotional and physical comfort during the study. This may involve providing them with comfortable seats and ensuring that they are relaxed as they participate.

During the research conducted for this project, the above ethical guidelines were followed. The participants were provided with the details of the study (see Appendix 2 for the information sheet), informing them about the study's aims, why they were selected for invitation as participants, where the study would take place and how long it would last and how confidentiality was to be considered. They were encouraged to decide by themselves whether to take part or not without any influence from the researcher. Those who chose to participate informed the researcher, thereafter, arrangements were made to interview them. Each of the participants was provided with a consent form (see Appendix 3) to read and sign. The interviews took place at a place considered safe. The ethics and design of this research was reviewed and approved by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Science Ethics Committee.

## **5.8 Data Analysis**

The Interview data collected during this study was analysed using thematic analysis, a popular qualitative studies technique, based on the versatility and usefulness of thematic analysis in many research disciplines. Thematic analysis is a technique of locating, reading, and documenting commonalities in data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis fits with the data from qualitative studies and permits an examination of individuals' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic research, using a fact framework, can aid in displaying the underlying pattern of meaning in data sets. Examining participants perceptions of issues related to Saudi Arabia's 2030 policy ambitions was the purpose of gathering the interview data. The researcher's

decision to use thematic analysis is based on its strengths in managing a wide variety of research dimensions and in detecting commonalities across data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2022). According to Doyle et al. (2020), this method offers a structured but adaptable manner to locate the reasons and mechanisms that make up the phenomenon being studied in a framework of Critical Realism.

The researcher can delve deeper than superficial interpretations utilizing thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis (Anells, 1997) has a set of recognised stages and processes:

- Familiarization and Transcription: The process starts with immersion within the interview transcripts.
- Generating Initial Codes: Codes are systematically applied to data record segments.
- Searching for Themes: The codes are then classified into issues, reflecting the interconnectedness of principles, and contributing to the identification of underlying structures.
- Naming and Defining Themes: Themes are given names and descriptions, capturing their essence and contributing to a nuanced knowledge of the phenomena.
- Report Writing: The very last step entails consolidating the issues into a comprehensive narrative that goes beyond surface-level observations, connecting the diagnosed patterns to the study questions.

Ultimately, the usage of thematic analysis within the framework of critical realism aided in the thoroughness, precision, and applicability of the qualitative evaluation, which, in turn, strengthens the credibility and validity of the themes that emerged as the following:

### **Themes Developed through the Saudi Arabia Interviews**



- **Empowering Faculty for Enhanced University Performance:**

Motivated and talented faculty are crucial for improving university rankings. Providing a supportive environment, involving faculty in decision-making, and maintaining transparent management are key strategies. This approach aims to engage and empower faculty, driving significant advancements in university reputation and performance.

- **Enhancing Prestige Through Accreditation:**

Obtaining international accreditation is vital for improving a university's reputation and quality of education. High standards in organizational structure and program quality are required. In Saudi Arabia, accreditation is a key strategy for gaining recognition in global ranking systems like QS and TIMES.

- **Strategic Focus on Research Excellence:**

Strong research output, particularly in ISI journals, is essential for high university rankings. Effective strategies include financial incentives, grants, and international collaboration. Addressing challenges like insufficient funding and resistance to quality processes is crucial for enhancing research quality and global reputation.

- **Enhancing Autonomy for Strategic Growth:**

Academic and administrative autonomy are crucial for achieving strategic and quality improvements in universities. Limited autonomy hinders Saudi universities' ability to meet strategic goals and improve international rankings. Effective leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and community-focused management can enhance organizational quality and reputation.

- **Strategic Marketing for Enhanced University Reputation:**

Effective marketing strategies are essential for improving university reputation and attracting international students. Universities should leverage their online presence and highlight their strengths to build a strong, positive reputation. Attracting diverse international faculty and students through better contracts and scholarships is also crucial for improving global rankings.

- **Establishing a Prestigious Research Identity:**

Developing a distinct and prestigious research identity enhances university reputation and attracts international talent. Challenges include language barriers and systemic issues related to faculty publication requirements. Overcoming these involves integrating language-compatible criteria in rankings and fostering a culture of research excellence and global engagement.

- **Enhancing Academic Reputation:**

A strong academic reputation positively impacts university rankings, attracting top talent and international students. Strategies include hiring Nobel Laureates, increasing international student enrollment, and developing a unique research identity. Transparency, adherence to international standards, and a well-structured hiring process are vital for maintaining high academic standards and reputation.

### **Themes Developed through the UK Interviews**

- **Critical Role of Academic Research:**

Academic research is pivotal for a university's global reputation and ranking. Research output, international collaboration, and attracting international talent are essential for enhancing research impact and global rankings. Overcoming biases towards English-language research and resource constraints is crucial for achieving high research excellence.

- **Programs and Institutional Accreditation:**

Robust institutional structures and diverse academic programs bolster university reputation. Offering comprehensive graduate and doctoral programs, achieving international accreditation, and recruiting diverse faculty enhance institutional prestige. Structural reforms and strategic recruitment are pivotal for attracting top talent and achieving higher global rankings.

- **Quality of Education:**

High academic standards, alumni success, and faculty contributions significantly impact university reputation. A conducive learning environment and student diversity are vital. Research collaboration and policy influence are key for UK universities, while a friendly, inclusive environment is emphasized by Saudi universities. Attracting diverse international students enhances global ranking and reputation.

- **Past Reputation:**

Past reputation influences current perception and ranking of universities. Reputational bias favors prestigious institutions like Harvard and Oxford, impacting both subjective and objective ranking systems. This bias benefits institutions with strong historical reputations, enhancing their recognition and standing in education and research.

- **Need for Publicity:**

Strategic publicity is essential for enhancing a university's global reputation and visibility. Collaborating globally and promoting research achievements ensure significant recognition. Effective communication with international academics and media improves standings in global rankings and attracts attention from the global academic community.

- **Marketing:**

Effective marketing enhances university reputation and attracts global talent. Professional marketing strategies publicize impactful research and promote areas of excellence. Strategic messaging and media efforts improve visibility and stakeholder perceptions, showcasing favorable work conditions and significant research achievements to attract top talent.

- **Resource Attraction:**

A university's reputation significantly influences its ability to attract resources, particularly research funding. Prestigious institutions draw more funds, reinforcing high rankings and enabling the attraction of top talent and students. Overcoming challenges in securing funding and attracting renowned professors is crucial for achieving higher rankings.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research paradigm, and the design, and methods used in this study. The critical realist epistemology was chosen due to its usefulness and appeal to the researcher. This is an approach that is becoming more common, and has informed research that has attempted to make important contributions to changing society. The qualitative research design was adopted because of the exploratory nature of this study. This paradigm is indispensable when the views of any person or groups need to be explored. Primary data was preferred over its secondary counterpart due to the aim to produce contemporary and original findings. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews. This data collection method allowed the researcher to gather rich data that enabled him to directly address the research aims. Thematic theory was adopted as an analytic method and is a popular method which is widely used. However, the fact that this study is qualitative, giving room for the exploration of subjective

experiences whereby different people talk about their experiences, judgments and perceptions, the question of candour and veracity around the narratives of participants remains open.

## Findings

### 6.1 Introduction: Stepping onto the Global Stage and Managing a University's Reputation

An adage holds that Rome was not built in a day. Just like a city, a university's reputation cannot be built in a day. It is comparably difficult because building a university's reputation can take up to three decades before structural reforms can influence the university's reputation (Vernon et al., 2018). It involves a long journey of making development plans, executing them, benchmarking, addressing challenges, and becoming consistent in what one does best that puts the university on a global spot. This study made use of the literature and a qualitative approach of data collection and analysis to arrive at strategies that may help universities improve their global ranking and reputation. The study relied on interviews from senior leaders in several universities in the UK and Saudi Arabia. The study relies on the method of collating themes from qualitative data.

Several themes emerged that indicate what universities can do to improve their international ranking and maintain their reputation. One of the factors that play the biggest role in building reputation is academic research. Statements from interviewees in Saudi Arabia and the UK attest to the fact that a university's reputation and ranking depend on the impact that their research has on other studies and society. To measure impact on other studies, ranking often considers the number of times a study has been cited. In measuring impact on society, analysts often consider how the research has been used to support innovation, production, or a change in public policy. Interviewees in Saudi Arabia and the UK are aware that these factors are important when considering research output. However, criticism that is related to this subject is the bias that

exists when using research for ranking institutions. The interviewees in Saudi Arabia reveal that universities in their country are disadvantaged because most of their research is published in Arabic while ranking mostly considers research published in English. The interviewees in the UK did not tend to recognise this disadvantage. The other criticism related to research is that of past reputation influencing the recognition of research published in the current period as editors and referees are influenced by such a reputation. In this case, interviewees in the UK recognize the advantage that their universities have because they have already built a reputation. In their context, it becomes a matter of maintaining their reputation and ranking because of the stiffer competition that has emerged.

The second strongest theme is that of program accreditation. Having high global rankings comes with the advantage that degrees offered at the institution can be internationally recognized. To attract international students, there is a need to design programs that can be desirable internationally. It requires funding and better work conditions to attract high-caliber academicians from all over the globe. The issue of funding or resources emerges in the case of Saudi Arabia's and UK's interviewees in that they recognize the role that reputation plays in attracting resources, researchers have identified this as the Matthew Effect (Walberg & Tsai, 1983). Interviewees in the UK and Saudi Arabia are aware of the growing importance of the internationalization of faculty and the global ranking of universities. Quality of education is also an important theme because it also contributes a heavier weight in the ranking of institutions in some of the popular ranking systems, such as QS Ranking, Times Higher Education (THE), and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). The interviewees identified it as important though they differ on what aspects of quality education should be addressed. Positive publicity is the fourth-strongest theme. Building a reputation requires influencing the perception of stakeholders positively. A

university can perform well and at the high end of achievement, but it still needs publicity to tell the world what it does best. However, the analysis of the interviews carried distinctive themes as the following:

**Themes Developed through the Saudi Arabia Interviews:** motivated faculty are key to improving university rankings through a supportive environment and transparent management. Additionally, international accreditation is essential for enhancing university reputation and educational quality, crucial for global recognition. Furthermore, strong research output, financial incentives, and international collaboration are pivotal for achieving high university rankings. Academic and administrative autonomy, combined with effective leadership and stakeholder collaboration, further enhance university quality and rankings. Moreover, effective marketing and the strategic attraction of international students and faculty significantly improve university reputation and global standings. Developing a strong research identity and overcoming language barriers are also vital for enhancing university reputation and attracting talent. Lastly, a strong academic reputation, bolstered by transparency and adherence to international standards, is necessary for attracting top talent and improving rankings.

**Themes Developed through the UK Interviews:** academic research and international collaboration are pivotal for bolstering global reputation and rankings. In addition, robust institutional structures, diverse academic programs, and international accreditation are essential for enhancing university reputation and rankings. High academic standards, alumni success, and faculty contributions further boost university reputation and standings. Moreover, historical reputation significantly influences current university perception and rankings. Strategic publicity and global collaboration are crucial for enhancing university visibility and reputation. Effective



marketing and the promotion of research achievements attract global talent and improve university reputation. Consequently, a strong reputation attracts research funding and top talent, thereby reinforcing high university rankings.

## 6.2 Understanding of Ranking Systems

Various studies conducted on this subject have also inferred that an adequate understanding of the global ranking system for universities is required to improve the position on different global ranking tables (Qiao, 2019). University rankings are lists of certain groups of institutions, comparatively evaluated according to a set of indicators in descending order, where those with the best performance are listed first, followed by those with lower performance in the aspects analysed, as discussed in chapter four.

Further, University ranking can be understood as an attempt to classify academic and research institutions around the world. Some rankings focus on ranking local or regional universities, and others do so globally (Buckner, 2020). Considering that one of the main objectives of this classification is to assess the quality of higher education institutions, countries and universities are increasingly integrating them in their performance assessment processes.

As rankings theoretically represent the quality of teaching and research developed by higher education institutions, it is a fact that the observation of these classification lists influences the decision of future students to apply to a university or not, as well as influences the actions and decisions of university executive leaders, academic professors, governments and investors in higher education (Fontinha et al., 2018). According to Fontinha and colleagues, these ranking lists influence, above all, decisions and actions of the evaluated universities themselves, considering that, since the emergence of world rankings, they have been carrying out national and

international comparisons, and this causes changes in the daily life of the university, whether in the search for funding, whether from students, teachers, and researchers. However, if the position in the ranking conditions university activity, the importance of the quality of the measured data and the interpretive validity should be highlighted in order to optimize the information generated. This information generated by the rankings is used for various purposes, including responding to consumer demands to easily identify the position of an institution, assess the quality of institutions, help students decide where to study, guide researchers to choose the best place to work, inform governments in identifying where to invest resources, compare performances in order to promote improvements in management and institutional performance and to inform the regulation of performance measures (Vernon et al., 2018.). There are many criticisms about ranking classification methodologies in the sense that they can hide a series of methodological problems and anomalies in relation to indicators, arbitrary definitions, and manipulation possibilities.

“The University understands the importance of ranking and its relationship to quality processes and continuous improvement. The community has come to view the university by ranking.” (PCPM, 2021)

The various existing rankings use different methodologies that involve different indicators, some converging and others conflicting, thus often showing divergent results in terms of the positioning of universities. Due to the diversity of classification methods and initiatives, there are many criticisms made to the rankings presented in the literature, each one related to the indicators and the vision of those who propose another ranking matrix (Hou & Jacob, 2017).

The literature highlights University rankings as having become crucial tools for evaluating and comparing global educational institutions. Well-known systems such as Times Higher

Educational World University Ratings and QS World University Rankings utilize diverse criteria, such as, research productivity, academic reputation, faculty-to-student ratios, and international diversity. However, these ranking systems have faced increasing criticism for oversimplifying the complex nature of learning environments and reducing the assessment of educational facilities to numerical metrics. Academics argue that this approach may exaggerate the importance of research output over the effectiveness of classroom education, potentially leading to a homogenization of universities. Marginson (2021) specifically notes that the focus on rankings can drive universities toward prioritizing research at the expense of teaching quality.

University rankings wield a significant influence on institutions, shaping administrative strategy, resource allocation, faculty recruitment, and student enrolment trends. This phenomenon, known as the "rankings race," involves universities investing substantial funds to boost their rankings. However, critics argue that this practice may incentivize strategic behaviour that does not always align with the universities' primary goals (Hammond, 2000).

Ranking systems significantly impact universities globally, shaping their competitiveness and strategies. Institutions adapt tactics to improve their standings, investing in student experience, faculty quality, and research effectiveness. However, critics argue that these systems oversimplify complex educational operations, relying on quantitative indicators that may not fully represent research and teaching quality. There is a common concern that an emphasis on research in rankings may neglect teaching standards (Marginson, 2021).

University rankings foster international competitiveness, proponents would argue, motivating schools to excel. Produced by reputable raters, they evaluate factors like international diversity, research output, faculty quality, and academic reputation. Competing for higher rankings drives universities to enhance research, academic offerings, and institutional excellence

(Brankovic et al., 2018). This competition is said to benefit learners and institutions by promoting innovative instructional strategies, advancing research, and facilitating the hiring of outstanding faculty.

High-income country institutions tend to outperform those in low- or middle-income nations in international rankings, potentially hindering efforts to establish a global presence by organizations in developing nations (Shahjahan et al., 2017). The disparity raises concerns about the sustainability of global educational inequalities. Lower-tier universities may struggle to attract top talent, funding, and international relationships. Institutions strive for global recognition through initiatives like recruiting international students and forming global partnerships. University rankings significantly impact strategies, resource allocation, faculty recruitment, and student enrolment, prompting institutions to invest heavily. However, the competitive nature of rankings has faced criticism for potentially diverting universities from their primary goals.

Global university rankings significantly impact educational institutions, influencing institutional goals, resource allocation, faculty recruitment, and enrolment patterns. The competitive "rankings race," where universities invest substantial sums to improve standings, is noted by Shahjahan et al. (2022). National differences in higher education frameworks and approaches, influenced by regulatory structures, impact institutions' strategic goals and resource allocation. Varied levels of regulation in these systems affect universities' freedom to gain international recognition.

The "Excellence Initiative" in Europe exemplifies how government intervention can drive change in higher education. Leadership policies play a crucial role in shaping ranking strategies and the establishment of world-class institutions. Many national governments create plans and funding sources to foster the development of outstanding educational institutions. Lee & Naidoo

(2020) note that several countries base resource allocation and funding decisions for universities on ranking results, incentivizing institutions to enhance their standings.

Global institutional ranking systems have sparked debates regarding their impact on the quality of education in higher learning institutions. Hazelkorn & Mihut (2021) note that while these systems primarily aim to evaluate research productivity and academic status, they may inadvertently influence teaching behaviours and priorities. Institutions may prioritize hiring instructors with strong academic credentials to boost rankings, potentially resulting in more researchers but also raising concerns about the passion and classroom experience of educators, potentially impacting the standard of instruction.

Historically, global university ranking systems have prioritized internationalization, academic authority, and research output, often overlooking the social impact of institutions. King (2013) emphasizes that societal influence varies across cultures, necessitating careful consideration or standardized assessment in global rankings. Existing systems often focus on academic and commercial impacts of research, neglecting broader social contributions. Universities play a vital role in addressing real-life issues like social exclusion, sustainability, and economic growth, aspects rarely considered in ranking evaluations.

Global ranking methodologies have traditionally emphasized internationalization, academic output, and standing. Deem & Brehony (2005) argue that this focus has inadequately represented universities' societal impact, including academic contributions to global issues like economic development, social inequality, and long-term sustainability. There is a call for more comprehensive and socially responsible ranking systems that consider universities' broader societal responsibilities due to the current lack of emphasis on social influence.

The Peer Review Process is a crucial element in determining a university's status as a world-class institution. Integrated into global ranking systems, this process involves professionals evaluating colleges based on established criteria, including international collaboration, research quality, and academic prestige. It provides a qualitative assessment, complementing the quantitative measures in rankings. According to Hazelkorn (2015), the Peer Review Process underscores the importance of research excellence, investigation, instruction, and societal impact—essential components of world-class universities. Assessing academic reputation is a primary focus, with peers evaluating global influence, research output, and faculty competence. Positive feedback from peers significantly enhances a university's standing as a top institution.

Understanding the dynamic interaction between elite universities and ranking systems is crucial in appreciating the modern higher education landscape. While ranking systems face criticism for shortcomings and potential negative impacts, they continue to serve as tools for assessing colleges globally. The pursuit of world-class status has profound effects, fostering globalization in higher education and influencing public policy. To enhance the integrity and influence of educational institutions in an increasingly interconnected global community, stakeholders in higher education must comprehend and adapt to this evolving relationship.

### **6.3 Saudi Arabia Interviews**

#### **6.3.1 Motivated and Talented Faculty**

One of the recurring strategies for improving university rankings proposed by Interviewees in Saudi Arabia was motivating faculty members. According to PCPF, “Providing an attractive academic environment” (PCPF, 2020), is one of the ways through which university ranking can be improved. Each university has a lot of opportunities to interact with the local city

and regional community - with representatives of business, social non-profit organizations, etc. When an educational organization seems to exist on its own, turning into a kind of closed "island", into an "ivory tower," such a position must be questioned because universities are potentially powerful actors in the development of their region or city. For this to happen, institutions need to desire to be such an engine, to take on social responsibility (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). However, local communities also need to learn to be open, interested in interacting with the university.

The perception that the changes that a university intends to bring about to improve its international ranking are not possible without a talented and motivated faculty is prevalent strongly across all the interviews. Many of the interviewees reported that because of the less talented and motivated faculty, their respective universities are unable to achieve significant change in the quality of education, nor are they able to improve the quality of their research (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). In fact, the less capable faculty at their respective universities were thought to have motivation levels that were perilously low, the majority of the interviewees claimed that this hindered the development of their respective universities and slowed the process of improving the quality of education/research.

Among the ways in which a university can improve its ranking through staff motivation is by taking care of its teaching staff. Thus, a university's concern for its teachers is becoming especially important today: so that they take on their role and become skillful "pilots" in the boundless seas of information experienced by their students.

Additionally, cultivating a culture of friendliness is important in promoting motivated and talented faculty. A culture of friendliness is one of the most important intangible assets that an educational organization possesses in its faculty, staff, and students. Therefore, it is necessary that

the university should carefully analyse once again whether the university has done everything to be a comfortable, friendly place (up to elementary cleanliness in every corner of the university). If gaps and shortcomings are found, they should be addressed without delay. After all, university friendliness is not just a formal "courtesy"; it is an indicator of respect (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). In the same context, regularly reviewing the attitude of the university towards international students, who may lack spoken language confidence, or do not speak the language of the host country, is significant. Only by this kind of action can a university speak about strengthening its reputation and positions in international rankings.

According to the interviewees, the role of each employee in improving the ranking of the university cannot be understated. Nevertheless, the responsibility for the reputation lies primarily with the governing bodies. The senior management makes the decisions necessary to innovate. Such responsibility requires a certain style of management, or "a different sensitivity." This management style is transparent, honest, and flexible, it engages employees, forms strong bonds, and focuses on building the tangible and intangible assets of the university. Researchers argue that employees tend to feel motivated when they are directly involved in the critical decision-making process. Thus, interviewees were concerned about engaging all faculty to play a significant role in improving the university rankings in Saudi Arabia.

### **6.3.2 Institutional and Programme Prestige and Accreditation**

Another theme, which is very prevalent across the interviews conducted, relates to institutional and programme reputation. Most of the interviewees believe firmly that institutional and programmatic accreditations strongly and positively affect, not only the organizational structure of a university, but also its quality of education, both of which are robustly associated



with academic reputation. For instance, to acquire international institutional accreditation a university is required to have high standards in its organizational structure, policies, and efficiency. Similarly, to acquire international programme accreditation, a university is required to have the standards of the programs it offers at an international or world-class level. In Saudi Arabia, attaining an institutional programme accreditation was understood by participants as one of the principal ways to improve academic reputation, in trying “to seek institutional and programme accreditation to enter some ranking systems such as QS & TIMES” (PCPM) **The QS is the annual publication of the university ranking which names the world’s best universities for the study of different subjects. It is one of the most popular and widely accepted university rankings in the world. It is approved by the International Ranking Group Experts. It ranks universities based on academic peer review, faculty/student ratio, employers’ reputation, citation per faculty, and international staff ratio** (*QS Universities Rankings - Top Global Universities & Colleges*, 2018).

### 6.3.3 Robust Emphasis on Research

Similarly to the UK, research in Saudi Arabia was identified as one of the best ways to improve the reputation and the general ranking of the universities in the country. Several interviewees stated the importance of research in improving their university’s global ranking that this cannot be understated. For instance, according to PCPS;

Research – As most ranking systems have research & citations as a key component of the ranking criteria, one of its main strategies is “investment and motivation” in research publications in ISI journals, through financial incentives and awards and research grants. In addition, there is also a promotion of

“collaborated research” with other researchers/institutions worldwide. Normally the institution has a central research unit to work on “internal and external” grants and funding to expand the scope of the research, especially for a comprehensive research focused institution (PCPS).

For another participant the approach involved, “building the International Ranking Unit, which includes policies to increase research” (PCPN). Several challenges were cited to be contributing factors to poor global ranking. According to PCPD, the following are major challenges experienced.

A general problem is that research for faculty members is only for promotion, not for community service. There is resistance to what is related to the ranking in particular and the quality process in general, and for this reason we have worked on many courses, explanatory courses and videos to introduce the international ranking, its importance and objectives. There is a lack of financial support for all things related to ranking indicators, and the financial support will only take place in accordance with tight initiatives and the results are clear. The absence of accurate university information and statistics from the university's international ranking unit, so we worked on an electronic system to quickly access the required information (PCPD, 2020)

Cooperation with other organizations and institutions was commonly identified as an ideal strategy to improve on research in the universities in Saudi Arabia. This was clear in the response of an academic expert in the Saudi Arabia context, PCPS.

Academic/Industry linkages – .... has a well-established “endowment” program and is using it for its infrastructure portfolio for rent for sustainable financial resources, and cooperative/joint collaborative ventures establishment with leading industries for research

or business incubations to forward ... educational profile and inadvertently ranking profile (PCPS, 2020)

Another interviewee stated that “Focusing on research requirements” will help improve the reputation of the university, hence improved ranking. Among the strategies that were proposed in addressing the research question, increasing the funding allocation was included. For instance, PCPF suggested that “Increase financial allocations to support, reward and motivate faculty members and develop them - more contracts with international professors - developing administrative systems and ensuring work flexibility - preparing and building leadership cadres” (PCPF, 2020).

Therefore, from the views of respondents, government and institutions should focus on investing in quality research as one of the ideal strategies to improve their global ranking. The performance of the faculty, the researchers and the students influence the ranking of an institution. The stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the growth of the institution because it increases their standing as a researcher and as a teacher. The government is also a legitimate stakeholder in the university because the research conducted also has benefits for the country. They see research as the systematic work that produces something valuable for them. Research should not be conducted by a layman or a student but by the professional researchers. Research needs equipment, data and funding. There are examples of it being conducted at the highest level but the common problem that the research institutions face is the lack of talented researchers and funding. Only if this is resolved can institutions produce globally recognized results. Academic reputation and research are the two main areas that affect a university’s growth. Both the students and the teachers want the atmosphere to be liberal, academic, and friendly. Every institution spends large amounts of money and time to attract talented students and academics.

### 6.3.4 Academic and Administrative Autonomy

The theme regarding academic administrative autonomy was not very predominant across the interview data. A few of the academic participants noted that because of curtailed autonomy pertaining to administration and education, their universities are finding it hard to realize different strategic and tactical goals related to the development and improvement in the quality of education (Pruvot & Estermann, 2018). Since their universities are struggling to realize the strategic and sub-strategic objectives associated with development and quality of education, their ranking is not improving as much as they desire on different international ranking tables for universities.

One of the interviewees in Saudi Arabia emphasized the importance of a ‘community-like’ organizational leadership as an ideal approach for improving institutional organization.

A key factor is the leadership factor, and with the leadership factor, the commitment of the whole “people” factor wholeheartedly into the “we” factor of the university academic & administrative strategic / tactical / operational focus on the “people factor of the “students and societal” needs and expectations. Another key factor is the resources management and the human factor capabilities and capacities that normally undermine most promising initiatives. This is the human talent management and the human capital that underscore all of the institutional and collegial performances (PCPS)

Technically, for a high reputation, positive assessments and judgments about a particular organization must be perceived and supported by the relevant public. However, before becoming "public opinion," these assessments and judgments are first formed among stakeholders. The most general definition of a "stakeholder" was formulated by R. Edward Freeman in his now-classic

stakeholder concept - "a group or individual person who can influence himself and who is influenced by the achievement of a certain goal and objectives ". In this case, stakeholders are inclusive of the teaching, learners, and non-teaching staff involved in the administration of the universities in both Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. Although stakeholder is a general term, there are many ways to differentiate university stakeholders. Universities stakeholders can be divided into 4 main categories:

- i. Professionals: Professionals in a university setting include educators, researchers, professional services staff, and managers.
- ii. Students: It entails current students, graduates, and applicants.
- iii. Related groups: Related groups are families, communities, employers, and sponsors.
- iv. Associates: Associates include other universities and associations, government, and other regulatory bodies.

According to most of the interviews conducted in this study, appropriate autonomy, and proper collaboration amongst the four stakeholders are important in improving the ranking of the universities.

Collaboration among stakeholders is formed through connections. Moreover, it can be said that an organization does not just "build relationships" - it is itself a "system of connections." And the quality of an organization largely depends on the quality and strength of these ties. This is why it is highly recommended that the organization forms a dialogue with each of its stakeholders, through different channels: websites, social networks, newsletters, meetings, etc. In the process of building dialogue, universities provide information, and consider its context and ethos, at the same time listening to stakeholders (internal and external) in order to find out and take into account their needs and expectations. Of course, it can be difficult to meet these

demands and expectations (and to finance the areas of university activity that correspond to them), but choice and prioritization are important here.

In considering reputation, perceptions need to be considered. It is perception that helps the resonance that is necessary to initiate and support the dialogue between a university and its stakeholders. In particular, this is how the Vice-Rector for Communications of the University of Navarra, Juan Manuel Mora, comments on this issue: “Autonomy and Reputation is a set of intangible values shared both by the general public and by stakeholders associated with the organization. Moreover, the stakeholders are active participants in its formation: a good reputation is the result of their positive perception based on recognizing the organization and on the experience of interacting with it. All this allows stakeholders to recommend such an organization to the public” (Mora. J. M, 2020).

According to PCPF, communication occupies a central role in academic and administrative autonomy, he stated that this should happen “through active communication with academic professors from different countries through the multiple tracks of partnership and interaction.”

Building autonomy among stakeholders requires the university, without exaggeration, to be able to "360-degree view" - so as not to miss a single stakeholder with their distinct expectations and degree of perception. But such a vision is possible only with the participation of all members of the organization and, “the support of higher leadership at the university with belief in the importance of ranking and its reflection on the university's institutional community and its employees, and working according to a clear vision and not just an emergency plan” (PCPD).

After all, everyone, by creating an internal culture, maintaining connections, and gathering information from stakeholders, is thereby able to contribute to the increase of intangible values -

university openness, quality, and consistency, and that means – contributing to reputation. Thus, reputation is not the responsibility of any particular university department - it is a common concern of the entire university.

### **6.3.5 Marketing**

**The interviewees from the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia** suggested that marketing helps universities by improving their reputation, and by attract international students both of which impact strongly and positively the ranking of a university. However, the interviewees had little to say about what a marketing strategy should be based upon and what mediums should be used in its realisation.

The international ranking of a university considers the number of foreign students that have travelled from other countries for learning purposes. The number of people with access to higher education in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom has increased considerably in recent decades (Safón & Docampo, 2020). This is due to improvement in the economic situation, and significantly, government policies in both nations. The private higher education sector has also been growing in this period. However, across the interviews conducted, it was observed that despite the numbers mentioned, this is a market that was viewed as still having potential for growth, so expanding educational institutions. An even greater reason to invest in developing reputation and marketing.

Diversity is understood as key to increasing global ranking. Therefore, marketing is centred in looking to increase the number of international students in institutions as a strategy to improve global ranking. According to one interviewee, PCPS, “International Faculty/Student ratio – Another key strategy is to bring on board more of these international faculty and students to

enhance the diversity of the faculty and student bodies through better contractual offerings and scholarships.” With this approach, future students and their families have a great interest in collecting information about institutions, professions, job market, salaries, career opportunities, specializations, study time, among many other metrics. According to (Tremblay, 2008), there is a great need for quality information about higher education and its consequences. The content of the marketing approach needs to address the doubts and insecurities of those who are about to enter university. Advertising in its traditional form is not assumed to easily answer the questions that most concern students. This information will reach many sectors of the market of potential students. It is common to have to explain, for example, the differences between graduate and MBA programmes.

Marketing can also play a significant role in improving the reputation of a university. According to PCPH, “Paying more attention to its appearance in media through the university's website” (PCPH, 2021). In this regard, marketing should pay attention to details about the institution itself, its policies, and structure. Most importantly, it is possible to develop a bond with the pre-college audience. This is a factor that can be decisive in potential students’ decision making. Overall, this is a strategy that allows a university to position itself in the media channels frequented by future students. It was suggested that “development of the university's website” (PCPF, 2020) is among the significant ways that an institution can showcase themselves to the world.

Because this is a non-invasive practice, contrary to traditional advertising, the public will be more likely to pay attention. The achievements of the educational establishment must also be publicized through this medium (Safón & Docampo, 2020). They can be community works,



social projects, or academic articles already published by students and academics. The important thing is to make the university known beyond the quality or form of teaching offered.

### **6.3.6 Development of Research Identity**

Most of the interviewees claim that a university must have a research identity as the unique and ideally prestigious research identity of a university is correlated positively with its reputation, which attracts international faculty and students. There are some methods, which the interviewees have suggested to establish a unique and prestigious identity. One of such methods is ensuring the clear and bold name of the university on the outputs it produces. One of the strategies that was suggested by an interviewee in Saudi Arabia was the creation of a unit for managing identity reputation:

By establishing a unit for “identity reputation” and international ranking, and conducting workshops continuously with university leaders, deans of colleges, assistant deans aimed at raising awareness of the importance of achieving the requirements of international ranking systems, not only would this help to achieve better positions, but improve work at the university in general through seeking to rise to the international level (PCPT, 2021).

There are challenges that are associated with establishing an identity brand for universities in Saudi Arabia. Among the challenges include incompatibility of the Arabian national language and the international language commonly used in research. According to PCPD, “On the research side, only publishing in the English language is accepted, and this means excluding published research in the Arabic language. In 2018 our university published about 7,000 research papers, of which only 935 were counted in the scoups database because most of our research is in the Arabic language. Regarding to the index (international faculty & students), this is a sovereign matter.

Ranking systems cannot counter a decision directed towards, for example, Saudization and a university may not support forms of internationalization because this is a decision for higher authorities in the country. While there are universities in America where more than 95% of the faculty are American, yet you find them have 100% in some indexes. Participants believe in academic reputation, but as to the methods for measuring reputation, many of those who attended regional and international meetings and conferences have rejected current methods and mechanisms for “measuring academic reputation” (PCPD, 2020). Therefore, for many, there is a need to integrate language compatible criteria in university ranking.

Another challenge that affects development of brand identity that was mentioned related to “weakness in research and publishing, the gaining of a Nobel Prize or international awards, research excellence awards, faculty members are obligated to publish in the name of the university at least once a year, and this is among the criteria of evaluation and contract renewal for faculty” (PCPN).

### **6.3.7 Academic Reputation**

For every university - public or private - reputation plays an important role (Munisamy et al., 2013). It affects the attractiveness of the institution in the eyes of applicants, employers, and partners. It is commonly believed that a high position for national universities in the rankings enhances the image of the country as a whole and attracts foreign students. Universities need to become more transparent, as well as introduce internationally accepted standards for scientific research and the training of specialists. The theme regarding academic reputation is not only common among responses in all the interviews but is also very clearly present in the literature (Moed, 2017). All the interviewees believed quite strongly that the academic reputation of an

educational institution significantly affects its international standing or ranking. Many states across the globe are launching special faculties to improve their universities' global rankings. In Saudi Arabia, a program was designed to increase the competitiveness of the best universities in the country with global research institutions and educational centres. Academic reputation has always been important in the academic environment at both the individual and disciplinary levels, and today it still plays a key role in the search for fellow potential research partners (Peters, 2019). Scientific reputation is extremely significant at the institutional level, being, on the one hand, an influential factor of external evaluation, and on the other, an instrument for supporting university development, since it indicates the attractiveness of a university for international partners.

Thus, a good reputation increases an institutions soft power at the global and national levels, guides the institutional strategy and educational policy of governments, has a significant impact on world rankings (QS, THE), helps attract the best professors, staff, students, and applicants, and attracts funding for research, teaching, and institutional development, fosters better interaction between universities - this is a shortlist of the extremely beneficial consequences of a good reputation. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), reputation is "the prevailing public opinion about someone or something" and that "reputation is an intangible asset that brings tangible results." Above, we mentioned the system for measuring corporate reputation. What about higher education? The Centre for Research on Governance and University Reputation is studying this issue. According to the centre, university reputation factors differ from corporate reputation factors (Kiraka et al., 2020). Thus, the researchers identified "12 foundations" (or intangible assets/values of universities), which are determined by the specifics of the sphere of higher education. These spheres are determined by considering the quality of

teaching, the quality of research work, value to society, the quality of the workplace, practice and internship of students, employment opportunities, access to resources (for students, researchers), economic and financial stability, ethics, social responsibility and corporate citizenship (Kiraka et al., *ibid*). Other factors that are considered include globality and interaction, innovation and attractiveness, and leadership and management.

Interviewees have suggested different strategies to improve the academic reputation, which include the hiring of Noble Laureates as faculty members, a dramatic increase in the size of international students, and developing a unique and impressive research identity. All these strategies, which the interviewees have suggested to improve academic reputation, are promising according to the literature (Kermanshachi, & Safapour, 2017). However, much emphasis was evident on hiring Noble faculty members in improving global ranking. Interviewees commonly stated that universities should have a well-structured process of selection and hiring that will ensure that the most talented candidates are absorbed as university teachers and faculty members.

In terms of improving the academic reputation, interviewees prioritised, “understanding some issues, details and methods of evaluation done by ranking systems. After controlling for the outputs of teaching, research, and administrative governance, our rank was not improved except after knowledge of the evaluation methods and mechanisms of ranking systems” (PCPN).

Academic reputation – There is normally a central PR unit to promote on the publicity of the institution initiatives towards its academic reputations, standings and activities, but since the university, the participant belongs to, is a long-established public university, it is always on the “top of mind” recall by the public or the peer reviews in terms of academic or employment reputation and societal recognitions regionally and internationally (PCPS).

Establishing a unit for “identity reputation” and international ranking, and conducting workshops continuously with university leaders, deans of colleges, assistance deanships to raise awareness of the importance of achieving the requirements of international ranking not only to achieve better positions but to improve work at the university in general in order to rise to the international level (PCPT).

## **6.4 The UK Interviews**

### **6.4.1 Uncompromising Role of Academic Research**

The interviewees in the UK recognized the substantial role that research plays in building university reputation and ranking. An interviewee suggested that one of the effective ways they have used is to “build the research identity to improve the global reputation as most ranking systems are led by the matrix of successful research” (PCPR, 2020). Another claimed that “All our analysis emphasises that research is the primary element of our worldwide ranking” (PCPW, 2020). This reflects the reality that many universities recognize the fundamental role of research in building a reputation. Research output is one of the ways in which a university’s reputation can be considered to be based on merit or objective performance (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). An interviewee noted that one of their goals is to increase their Nobel prizes from four to five (PCPR, 2020). The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) is one of the most popular ranking systems, which uses criteria of six factors amongst them is the winning of Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (Safón & DoCampo, 2020; Hou & Jacob, 2017). It has a weight of 30 percent when awards by alumni and awards by current faculty members are considered. However, Vernon et al. (2018) consider Nobel Prizes as a luxury criterion that only favours prestigious universities. A challenge in this area is that the size of the institution also affects its output in terms of the

number of published articles (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). Some forms of bias may also favour universities that publish journals in English (Vernon et al., 2018), researchers in the UK and other English-speaking countries have an advantage in this aspect.

While conducting research, there is a recognised need for international collaboration to be able to produce the kind of studies that have global impact (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). For instance, an interviewee claimed that they “have imported some faculty from outside the university to lead some research groups” (PCPR). Internationalization of research improves the universities ranking as it is one of the criteria in three popular rankings (Hou & Jacob, 2017). In the UK, the interviewees recognized the importance of international collaboration in research as contributing to the reputation of the institution. As an interviewee recognized, it is important to establish “communications in particular with other academics around the globe... the universities most successful in global research” (PCPR). Another interviewee claimed that to build a reputation around research, “the university has to produce research collaboratively with other best research universities in the world” (PCPW). Buckner (2020) discusses the role that international collaboration plays among institutions, helping improve the quality of research output and the global ranking of universities. Higher education institutions are shifting from nationalization of goals and strategies to internationalization of goals and strategies to align with the growing significance of globalization in national economics (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). Buckner (2020) elaborates the emerging trend of the Global Research Universities (GRUs), which are universities that focus on international-oriented research, global ranking, and their “ability to attract high calibre international students and faculty.” A focus on the internationalization of research is a way of legitimizing universities' ranking in terms of influencing stakeholders' perceptions.

#### 6.4.2 Programs Offered and Accreditation

Safón & DoCampo (2020) identify that institutional structure is another way in which universities can build their reputation. To have a respectable structure, a university must have a structure that is on a par or reflects those of prestigious universities. They need to offer graduate programs in addition to undergraduate programs. Their doctorate programs should be able to attract high aptitude candidates who can create an identity through their doctoral thesis (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017). Their doctoral students and faculty should be able to conduct research that can be published in reputable journals as well as attract grants for research from the government and non-governmental organizations (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). In line with the goal of internationalization is the need to design programs that can be offered to international students, which comes with the need for additional resources (Buckner, 2020). This set of observations matches the goals of attracting faculty and international students present among the UK interviewees who clearly identify the role of internationalization. One interviewee responded that “we look for the best people internationally to lead research groups (PCPR). The need to attract academics from the global market is also reflected in another interviewee’s statements. She claimed that “the staff of the university needs to be very international because the university wants the best people to work for it” (PCPW). To have a global perspective, a university needs to recruit its faculty from a diverse background in terms of nationality and getting the best in the world, regardless of nationality. The main challenge in institutional structure is that universities adopt similar characteristics or become homogenous in their structures while it may take at least thirty years for such modifications of institutional structure to influence its reputation internationally (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). Safón & DoCampo (2020) gives the example of Tsinghua University in China, which made structural reforms in the 1990s by adding new

programs, restoring old prestigious programs, and merging with other institutions. These structural reforms now contribute to its present reputation. An interviewee elaborated an example of structural reforms, “in 2004, the university became a larger university, merging with other institutions creating a new bigger university” (PCPR, 2020). The effects of the structural reforms on reputation may take about two decades to be realised. For instance, an interviewee gives the case of universities in Singapore that have improved in global ranking in the past 20 years (PCPW). However, things like positive publicity can accelerate the diffusion of reputation.

### **6.4.3 Quality of Education**

As one interviewee in the UK stated, his university has a “good reputation as a place to study” (PCPR). Another claimed that “the quality of education is high, and the university is recognised for that” (PCPW). The quality of education and academic reputation are themes that are related to the programming and accreditation theme. However, they are different because programming is the design or input aspect while academic reputation and quality of education depend on output, which refers to how the alumni perform in the labour market and the contributions that the faculty's research makes to production nationally or internationally. It also has an input aspect in terms of the delivery of content to students. The ARWU refers to this theme as the quality of education, the QS Ranking refers to it as academic reputation, and Times Higher Education (THE) refers to it as teaching (Hou & Jacob, 2017). They all put a heavier weight on the quality of education or academic reputation (Hou & Jacob, 2017; Vernon et al., 2018). The performance of alumni in the job market may also depend on the quality of students a university attracts, which gives universities with a high reputation an advantage (Hou & Jacobs, 2017). Influences on policy and production are important because it shows that a university is producing



useful knowledge. An interviewee in the UK suggests that “So, you expect the university influences the policy development for the government so the university works collaboratively on R&D (research and development) with companies” (PCPW). In this case, it shows that the university needs to contribute to innovation in the case of the private sector and the development of policy in the public sector. For the university to play this influential role, its research must be relevant to problems facing society and challenges facing businesses today (Vernon et al., 2018).

In the case of the Saudi Arabia interviewees, the quality of education is also measured by the conduciveness of the environment for learning, which includes the friendliness of peers. Kermanshachi & Safapour (2017) assert that education programs should produce similar results for minority groups as it has done for dominant groups. The success of universities can also be viewed in how it integrates with students from different countries as well as from minority groups within its national boundaries. An interviewee in the UK recognizes that Chinese students dominate the international cohort in their university, suggesting that “We have a big number of international students and instead of reducing this number we want to make diverse nationalities instead of relying on Chinese students” (PCPR). The ability to attract a more diverse group of international students depends on the university’s global ranking and reputation. It is also dependent on the conduciveness of the learning environment and friendliness of the university population.

#### **6.4.4 Past Reputation**

There is a need for publicity to overcome the reputational bias, which negatively affects the publishing and citation of research conducted by researchers from perceived low-ranking universities. Safón & DoCampo (2020) find that the bias negatively impacts universities in

Australia while boosting those in Japan and other prestigious universities. The reputation bias occurs to the extent that researchers from perceived high-ranking universities, such as Harvard and Oxford, get more articles published in reputable journals because the editors and referees have a bias in their favour (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). Other researchers are also more likely to cite research if the authors are from high-ranking institutions. Thus, whether there is the use of more subjective ranking systems, such as the US News and Quacquarelli Symonds' (QS) Ranking, or more objective ranking, such as the ARWU, the reputation bias will still have an effect. Safón & DoCampo (2020) describe the influence of "the result of the sum of past reputation (salience) and the signals received from the organization's current performance." Fortunately, the interviews in the UK involved universities with high reputations. For instance, one interviewee stated that "the quality of education is high, and the university is recognised for that" (PCPW). Another interviewee suggested that "We will always be known as, good medium size of teaching university, good reputation for research, for Science and Medicine, good reputation for a place to study" (PCPR). Thus, the universities in the UK may benefit from having a history of high global ranking or past reputation.

#### **6.4.5 Need for Publicity**

One interviewee claimed that they strive to be in the top 25 of the global ranking. The interviewee suggests the importance of "communications in particular with other academics around the globe" (PCPR). Communicating with other universities for collaboration would increase publicity and help to improve the visibility of the university at the international level. They note that selecting a few areas where the university should seek to become a leader and promoting them internationally would improve the reputation of the university. Another

interviewee claimed that “we look for opportunities to place stories of our research in the global media” (PCPW). This suggests that an institution may be conducting significant research today, but it lacks the professional publicity to match the self-promotion of high-ranking institutions, its research, therefore, may not get the recognition it deserves. Hou & Jacob (217) indicate that participation in global ranking systems increases the profile of participating higher education institutions. It is one of the ways of getting publicity through media coverage, with a higher ranking creating more visibility (Hou & Jacob, 2017; Vernon et al., 2018).

#### **6.4.6 Marketing**

Publicity can also be achieved through investing in media or marketing as discussed in the case of Saudi Arabia interviewees. The circumstances of UK universities also call for professional marketing. To maintain their reputation on the global market, universities need to publicize the high-impact research that has come out of their studies conducted by their faculty members. One interviewee claimed that the university selects a few areas, such as energy and cancer, and put more resources for research in those areas. As a result, “we put a lot of effort and money to build those areas and promote them internationally” (PCPR). And Safón & DoCampo (2020) consider university reputation as perceptions about the university from its stakeholders, which depends on how the university is presented in different forms of media and the experiences of the stakeholders while interacting with aspects of the university. One interviewee claimed there is a need for “messaging of the university” (PCPR). Without a high ranking and lack of publicity, impactful research may not receive enough publicity in the relevant media, where they attract attention because of their significance. It may require the need for investment in media efforts to supplement the media airtime that the research may attract.

Publicity is also necessary when seeking to attract faculty members because the reputation of the universities depends on the composition of its faculty. Attracting professors from other institutions on a global scale requires attractive perks and favourable work conditions. As one participant in the UK interviews explained, “when we advertise jobs, we don’t look in the UK, we look globally, and we try to attract the best talent we could find from around the world... that’s what we try to do” (PCPW). It explicates the important role that targeting and the design of advertisements plays in attracting high-caliber scholars from across the globe.

#### **6.4.7 Resource Attraction**

Resources, in terms of funding for research, follow the reputation bias in what is known as the ‘Matthew effect’ in that the high reputation institutions attract more funds for research, which reinforces their international rankings (Safón & DoCampo, 2020). The researchers from these institutions are also more likely to be recognized and be awarded. The ranking also influences the attractiveness of the institution to students, which also affects resources and calibre of students (Hou & Jacob, 2017). Some interviewees in the UK raised concern over the challenge of funding in being able to achieve their goal to achieve higher rankings. Reputation also affects attracting talent as one interviewee stated, “if you want to include somebody into an area of research, that would be easy because we are globally recognised as the centre of that research area and people want to work here” (PCPW). Low-ranking universities would have the challenge to attract renowned professors even in countries where the government is willing to support universities generously with funding to provide lucrative compensation for their faculty. The interviewee also claimed that “we talked about attracting the best researchers so you need money to do that” (PCPW). She also claimed that research facilities and conferences require funding, which can be

challenging for universities that are unable to attract adequate funding. It reinforces the Matthew effect where high-ranking universities get stronger because of their ability to attract financial and human resources for research and recognition.

## **6.5 Comparisons Between Participants' Responses: Saudi Arabia and UK**

The academic institutions from both countries share similar goals but different strategies to achieve their academic and institutional objectives. The respondents from Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom emphasize the significance of talented faculty as a primary strategy to achieve the goal of improved university ranking. Similarly, the participants from the United Kingdom also agreed with this perspective with a slight shift, such as inducting international faculty to achieve this goal through the support of global research and international coordination. This perspective is coherent with the view maintained by the Saudi participants.

However, some contrast exists between them regarding the performance of faculty. On the one hand, Saudi respondents highlight the significance of faculty motivation and their community interaction; on the other hand, the UK respondents consider research as their primary mechanism to achieve the goal of university improvement.

Academic prestige is a strategic goal for almost all national and international universities (Cutright, 2003). Institutional and programmatic prestige and accreditation consistently reflect the same perspective among all the participants. The Saudi participants identified organizational structure and internal and external academic policies and practices as the primary factors influencing their academic accreditations. In the same way, the respondents from the United Kingdom also identified how institutional efficiency enhances accreditation through attracting and retaining professionally qualified and internationally recognized faculty. The UK participants

consistently underlined the significance of internationalizing institutional programs and faculty recruitment. In other words, they have adopted a globalized approach to improve the prestige and accreditation of their academic institutions. Because of this strategic approach, the UK participants demonstrated their contrasting perspectives compared to the Saudi respondents. The difference in their approach suggest that UK respondents view faculty from a different perspective, putting more understanding on the significance of today's impactful academic activities for developing professional faculty.

Measuring and ranking academic performance is an uphill task for institutions seeking improved global-ranking (Frederickson & Stazyk, 2016). From the research findings mentioned above, dissimilarities exist in the perspectives of the two groups of respondents. For example, the Saudi participants retain a fundamental approach regarding research and its impact and relationship with institutional performance and improvement. The majority insist that research is a vital way to improve global ranking. And, in this endeavour, the respondents identify several operational and structural challenges that prevent Saudi institutions from improving their higher academic ranking level, this includes financial constraints which they view as remaining the most challenging aspect that prevents them from utilizing research success to enhance their global ranking.

In addition, most respondents identify research-related resistance, suggesting scope to improve global ranking, as a significant internal challenge that Saudi institutions routinely face. In contrast, the participants from the United Kingdom did not highlight any similar research-related issue affecting the performance of their institutions. In other words, the support for ranking-related activities remains higher, financial challenges do not appear as affecting the motivation for improvement in global ranking across the United Kingdom.

Administrative autonomy received more attention from the Saudi participants than the UK respondents. Educational institutions largely depend on a robust organizational structure and administration (Fowles et al., 2016). In both public and private educational organizations, administrative autonomy plays a significant role in improving strategic and operational goals (Choi, 2019). The respondents from Saudi Arabia said that in observing administrative autonomy, they face various obstacles to achieving their intended strategic and operational goals. It is difficult for many top administrators to implement their academic policy because of various autonomy issues they face routinely. In contrast, the participants from the United Kingdom did not mention that perspective, indirectly indicating that the UK's academic institutions rarely observe such organizational and bureaucratic challenges. Instead, many participants focused more on educational aspects rather than administrative obstacles. They substantially highlighted the significance of diverse faculty and leadership as prime aspects related to their academic performance and efficiency. In other words, faculty and administrators were understood to work closely to achieve their collective institutional goals (Bess & Dee, 2014). This aspect is also vital to evaluating the performance of faculty and administration structures (Bondar et al., 2021).

Saudi and UK interviewees retained a notably similar perspective regarding the significance of marketing. Educational institutions assume that they can improve their financial condition and academic goals using marketing as a primary strategy. Marketing is a diverse field as it includes numerous dimensions highlighted by the research findings. The respondents from Saudi Arabia explain that Saudi academic institutions mostly rely on the effective utilization marketing, including content marketing, as a way to achieve their strategic goals. In the same way, UK institutions also seek to improve their academic reputation and ranking by using marketing it trying to achieve numerous goals. For instance, Saudi educational institutions use

marketing to address the concerns and issues of their current and potential students. In contrast, UK universities employ marketing to attract international faculty, highlighting two different uses of marketing. Overall, marketing receives a similar perspective from the respondents from the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi and UK participants emphasized publicity to achieve university visibility and recognition. Globally, academic institutions know the significance of publicity as an organizational strategy to promote and achieve their strategic goals (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2022). They put their maximum administrative and technological efforts into publicizing their performance and academic achievements. For instance, Saudi respondents see publicity as a tool to address reputational bias, and many Saudi universities employ publicity to communicate with local and global audiences. A closer analysis suggests their approach is more limited, they may tend to address individual or specific local challenges. It also shows that the publicity policy of Saudi institutions is to improve their image particularly when concerned that perceptions may have changed because issues have been raised in public. However, to some extent, the publicity strategy of UK institutions remains considerably the same but focuses more broadly on showcasing their academic and organizational achievements in the global media. They want to attract local and international media to report their achievements. Overall, both countries' educational institutions do not underestimate the significance of marketing and publicity to enhance recognition. This aspect again highlights the nature of the relationship between prestige and institutional efforts (O'Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011).

The contrast in their approach to developing research identity is visible in both countries. Research identity remains the most prominent goal for academic institutions for all local, national, and international educational institutions (Knepper et al., 2019). The universities in Saudi Arabia



have tried to improve their research identity by guiding their researchers to highlight the names of their academic institutions when they publish academic papers in regional and international academic journals. This strategy looks highly effective as it shows how Saudi universities endeavour to build their identity. However, a few respondents highlighted significant challenges that create hurdles to achieving and retaining their goals. It includes the incompatibility between Arabic and English. In other words, it is a significant challenge for many Saudi universities to overcome the impact of this linguistic challenge in communication and publications. In contrast, this aspect is rare in the United Kingdom because the academic institutions have a language that helps them to develop and achieve their organizational goals.

Developing a reputation is a significant challenge for many Saudi universities. The respondents noted that many Saudi academic institutions prefer to hire and retain Nobel laureates to improve their prestige and standing in the global ranking. They offer attractive incentives to their current and potential Nobel laureates to continue providing academic esteem and for developing and retaining a robust research identity. On the other hand, UK universities focus more on transparency and international standards to attract faculty and students. They rely on their professional competence and performance as a solid dimension for local and international students. In other words, the universities from both countries retain different perspectives regarding enhancing their external reputation and standing, notably the Saudi strategy of attempting to develop their ranking by strategically hiring multiple Nobel laureates. In contrast, UK universities mostly rely on internal resources and performance to attract students and foreign faculty. Overall, both sets of academic institutions face numerous challenges as they endeavour to compete internally and internationally against different competitors (Shin & Harman, 2009).

## 6.6 Conclusion

The analysis of the interview data identified several themes that can inform university leaders strategically attempting to improve the global ranking and reputation of their institution. Top amongst them is the need for producing high-impact research and offering high-quality education that can be internationally recognized. Building a reputation is a difficult task that requires long term investment including improving academic performance and research and marketing. National governments may need to provide policy assistance to help overcome the Matthew effect so helping their national institutions to break through the glass ceiling of reputation. Unless a university has a reputation of prestige built on a long history where it can get unsolicited media attention, a sophisticated marketing strategy is necessary. International students and academicians need to be constantly informed of the achievements and improvements a university has made. Interviewees from both countries are aware that reputation is partly dependent on perceptions, which requires positive publicity and management. Some rankings, such as THE and QS Ranking, have a subjective aspect that is generated from surveys. University senior leaders need an understanding of the objective and subjective aspects of global ranking and reputation building that demand the careful allocation of resources. Focusing on the objective aspect alone, which includes the quality of education and research output, would not yield rapid results in reputation building. There is a continual need to publicize the achievements, enhancements, and assets of the university and its contribution to society.

## Discussion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Introduction

This study focused on the current state of tertiary education in Saudi Arabia in the context of Saudi Vision 2030. Specifically, this study explored the implementation of a strategic goal of Saudi Vision 2030 to integrate the country's higher education facilities into the global context by having at least five universities among the world's top 200 universities (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). At this point, two Saudi universities joined the top 200, including King Abdulaziz University (106) and King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (160) (QS World University Rankings, 2022). Saudi Vision framework was inceptioned in 2016 to diversify the country's economy and improve health, education, infrastructure, and tourism sectors to sustain long-term socioeconomic growth and development (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Another objective of this exploratory research was to elaborate a set of recommendations for the government and education authorities for attaining Saudi Vision 2030 in a time-efficient and sustainable manner. This study investigated the complexities of tertiary education in Saudi Arabia through the comparison and contrast with higher education in the United Kingdom. The primary goal of this study was to propose solutions to overcome the challenges encountered by higher education in Saudi Arabia and ensure that this field moves in the right direction in the context of the Saudi Vision 2030 framework. The study addressed four research questions during analysis.

This chapter is dedicated to the discussion of primary sources of data retrieved with the help of interviews with the participants from Saudi Arabia and the UK, and secondary sources of data, which included scholarly literature, Saudi Vision 2030 documents, and strategic plans developed by educational authorities for higher education in Saudi Arabia. Based on the findings generated by this research and a synthesis of all sources of data, this chapter provides a set of

recommendations and strategic advice for the authorities concerning tertiary education in Saudi Arabia and its attainment of Saudi Vision 2030 goals.

## **7.2 Brief Overview of Saudi Vision 2030**

Saudi Vision 2030 was developed in 2016 as part of the country's long-term goal to achieve better economic diversification, improve its main sociocultural fields, and ensure harmonious integration into the global market with the preservation of national culture. Specifically, according to the initial document released by Saudi Vision 2030 (2016), this framework set up various goals that fall within three major long-term perspectives, including creating a vibrant society, establishing a thriving economy, and maintaining an ambitious nation. Plans directed toward education are integrated into the perspective of establishing a flourishing economy. Specifically, Saudi Vision 2030 (2016) implies that the country has to close the gap between higher education outcomes and the demands of the job market. Since the core goal of this framework is to ensure the country's economic diversification and better integration into the global community, the purposes related to education have a similar roadmap. For instance, it is expected that higher education in Saudi Arabia not only attains the standards of the most prolific universities at the international level but outshines them (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016).

The framework lists several areas of potential improvement for the tertiary educational establishments to fulfil these goals. Notably, the Saudi Vision 2030 (2016) claimed that universities must create a modern curriculum with higher skill development standards, track and monitor student progress, collaborate with the private sector, and develop strategic partnerships with employers. Overall, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and outcomes have to be improved to ensure the attainment of the strategic goals related to education and the economy (Saudi Vision

2030, 2016). The framework determined the general pathway for higher education to develop to sustain the improvement of the Saudi workforce, improve research and development (R&D), and improve the country's intellectual capital.

This thesis aims to review the progress in the higher education system since the framework was incepted, determine if the system has the necessary resources to attain the framework's objectives and generate recommendations for the decision-makers on how to reach them in a sustainable and time-effective manner. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How are the concepts of quality and global recognition understood in the Saudi Arabia higher education context?
2. What has to be done for Saudi Universities to be recognized among the 200 best universities globally?
3. What external and internal challenges could hinder the improvement of the tertiary educational establishments in Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the potential pathways for Saudi universities to integrate into the list of the best universities in the world by applying global quality standards and maintaining the country's cultural identity?

These research questions were used to guide the entire study. The review has informed the analysis and recommendations presented in this chapter of interviews with participants, analysis of scholarly literature, and exploration of the official documents of Saudi Vision 2030. Both Saudi Vision 2030 (2016) and Vision 2030 Achievement Booklet (2020) have been investigated to detect if the educational system is committed to the strategic goals of the Vision and if they could attain them by 2030. It was decided, however, that the comparative analysis of the review

of the initial document describing the Vision's framework and the progress report are not enough to find out if Saudi Arabia's universities are progressing in the needed direction. Since the Vision chose the Western orientation regarding the quality of education, the involvement of the UK participants was justified.

### **7.3 Previous Plans to Improve Saudi Educational System**

Saudi higher education has undergone several phases of development and improvement. While the first university was established in Saudi Arabia in 1957, the first reform agenda was incepted in 2007 (King Abdullah Project, 2007). Specifically, in 2007, the King Abdullah Project was approved, which was a five-year plan to improve Saudi higher education. The focus of this project was teacher training, review of curriculum and educational materials, the introduction of contemporary technology, and implementation of innovative practices (King Abdullah Project, 2007). This plan addressed the future of higher education in Saudi Arabia, known as "Horizon," which refers to the mission and outcomes for higher education attained via strategic planning and adopted by all universities in the country (King Abdullah Project, 2007). This plan also focused on long-term objectives and outcomes. The only significant gap in this plan was the absence of any recommendations regarding attaining the outcomes and reaching the goals. Also, the plan had no viable attached to it. In other words, the plan was enthusiastic and ambitious, yet, it was unclear how universities and the entire system would achieve it without a rigorous strategy.

After five years was behind, this reform was prolonged. Later, after this plan reached its deadline, scholars and insiders admitted a significant gap in this project, which ignored teachers' voices. The development of higher educational establishments in Saudi Arabia as part of the five-year plan was implemented sporadically and unsystematically, while the teachers' initiative to be

part of this process was dismissed entirely. As a result, due to the inability to include the primary stakeholders of the educational system in the strategic plan, the reform was only a partial success. Even though teacher training and professional development were the primary objectives of the project, decision-makers failed to take into account the point of view of educators who had to undergo a significant transformation.

At the same time, this project also allowed the upgrade of the educational materials for students, introduced new technologies, implemented an essential idea of self-development to the curriculum, and introduced new extracurricular activities (King Abdullah Project, 2007). For instance, students were encouraged to invest in self-development in and out of the classroom, which prolonged their educational exposure and helped them to retain the material better. This plan was later labeled the Tatweer project and was deemed the most effective among the existing attempts to improve the higher education system. This plan was established as a reaction to external and internal pressure. Globalization, technological advancement, fast integration of other countries into the global economic system, and increased competition in the market forced Saudi Arabia to revisit its approach to the higher education system (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). It was planned to improve the national system of higher education to sustain the interests of the country in terms of economic and sociocultural development.

As it was recognized earlier, the Tatweer project was ambitious, yet, it was underworked. The education system was not developed up to the global development standard, especially compared to economically developed countries. Research and Development (R&D) was not addressed during the implementation of the improvement projects preceding the one set in 2016. According to several studies, improvement in higher education in Saudi Arabia has to stem from the principles of democracy, openness, and dialog, which was difficult to expect under the

circumstances (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). The Tatweer project and the plan preceding it were not completed without system improvement, yet, the decision-makers, educators, and authorities realized that the reform had to be accompanied by a clear framework that would allow necessary changes in higher education. As a result, Saudi Vision 2030 was developed in 2016 to fill the gaps and resolve unrealised ambitions from the previous improvement projects.

#### **7.4 Summary of Literature Review and Interview Results**

Past literature had a different approach to the issue of higher education improvement and generated a variety of findings. Frey & Rost (2010) argue that rankings have become important markers of a college's worth and affect specific academics' careers to a significant extent. Vernon et al. (2018) emphasized that concerns regarding research quality have prompted steps to focus on staff. Eminent professors are developed at leading colleges more than at somewhat less prominent institutions (Clauset et al., 2015). In the background, for example, the leading ten universities produce three times the number of future eminent professors as the colleges rated 11 via 20 (Clauset et al., 2015). It has been observed that a significant fraction of the ranking weighting emerges from how a college is regarded in terms of academic standing, the variety of research study citations it has produced, and the employer's online reputation (Dill & Soo, 2005). Consequently, to boost the university's position, colleges have worked to establish a more powerful standing for the college brand name (Altbach, 2015). Furthermore, collaborating with other institutions and engaging with elite institutions is considered an essential strategy for moving an institution in the direction of high levels of international recognition (Marginson, 2007).



To raise a university ranking and bring in a more significant number of international students, the universities are working towards having reputable brand name recognition (Harvey, 2008). This can include specific things like making sure that the university website is imposing and updated with the best information (Marginson, 2007). To improve their international standing as a high reputation institution, colleges undertake brand building activities (Merisotis, 2012). However, research studies recommend that potential students consider both concrete and intangible aspects when choosing an institution, such as organization brand image and individual preferences (Foroudi et al., 2019).

Offering diversity in universities' programmes and the resources spent on economic support for diversity, can benefit an adjustment in ranking position (Henderson & Herring, 2013). Universities comprehend that augmenting the number of programs taught in English could eventually substantially improve a university's position (Jarocka, 2015). Moreover, the wide variety of international students and global faculty can improve proficiency on the 'internationalization' ranking while also feeding into global standing (Hägg & Wedlen, 2013). Supporting research students entering the initial level of research as a uniform population is no longer acceptable (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). The commitment to supplying students with the resources and aid they require to prosper is essential to the long-term success of each student (Clarke, 2007). Whether the university is partnering globally or otherwise, participating in global seminars is considered an efficient approach for raising profiles (Liu & Cheng, 2005). Several effective high-ranking establishments are known to develop specific tactics to bring in and assist people from different backgrounds, along with a general human capital structure with specialized strategies for drawing in and sustaining candidates from diverse backgrounds (Andersson & Konrad, 2003).

The numerous existing ranking systems use various approaches that include multiple indicators, some converging, and others conflicting. Offering an appealing scholastic atmosphere is among the ways ranking positions can be boosted. Each institution has opportunities to engage with the local city or regional community - with representatives of business, society, or charitable sectors.

Universities are potentially powerful actors in advancing their region or city. The perception that a college's strategy to enhance its global ranking is not possible without skilled and inspired professors was prevalent throughout all the interviews. Many interviewees held the view that with less gifted and motivated faculty, their respective universities cannot bring about the tectonic adjustment in the quality of the education they seek, nor are their universities able to boost the quality of their research. Additionally, a growth culture is essential in promoting motivated and gifted professors. A culture of friendliness can be identified as one of the intangible possessions that an educational organization possesses in its professors, personnel, and students. Therefore, it is necessary that an institution carefully consider whether it has done whatever is required to be a comfortable, friendly institution for staff (up to elementary cleanliness in every corner of the college).

In this study, direction and advice was sought to support the improvement of Saudi Arabia's higher education system, particularly the international ranking of the colleges in the country. Numerous interviewees specified that the value of research culture in improving international ranking cannot be understated. A fundamental issue is that research for faculty members is a means to promotion and is not a sector norm. There is resistance to what is needed to move towards a position where high-quality research is the standard. The sector has produced numerous courses, explanatory programs, and video material to present the national global

position, its relevance, and objectives for higher achievement. Lack of financial support for ranking improvement activity is a concern.

In the UK, the interviewees identified the relevance of international collaboration in the study as contributing to institutional ranking progress. As an interviewee recognized, it is essential to establish collaborations, particularly with various other high reputation institutions around the globe (this participant was in an institution with high numbers of international students). Providing high quality of education, as well as high academic credibility, are qualities related to the success of programmes and also international accreditation. Institutional reputation and quality of education depend are in part dependent on how graduates do in the labour market and the contributions that their research impact makes to the country or globally. Institutional reputation and quality of education has an impact in terms of web presence to students. The ARWU refers to this motif as the quality of education and learning; the QS Position refers to it as an educational track record and Times Higher Education (THE) refers to it as teaching.

The significance of university ranking in today's academic environment cannot be overstated, as it profoundly impacts institutional success (Altbach, 2015). Consequently, universities worldwide are vigorously pursuing diverse strategies to bolster their ranking positions (Liu and Cheng, 2005). The literature reviewed in this enquiry indicates a core range of activities within the strategies adopted by universities to enhance their rankings, emphasizing different dimensions of significance that together contribute to their pursuit of higher standing.

## 7.5 Elements of Institutional Strategies

Institutions are focusing on Quality Research. University rankings, as argued by Frey & Rost (2010), significantly impact academics careers but often fail to accurately reflect research quality. Vernon et al. (2018) highlight concerns about research repeatability and impact, prompting calls for improvement. While current ranking systems analyse research performance, their effectiveness in evaluating quality is debated. Developing standardized measures for research assessment is crucial for reflecting genuine quality in higher education. Critical examination of research excellence is necessary, despite the absence of universal evaluation metrics. Research is vital for societal advancement, faculty development, and student skill enhancement. Investing in research funding can significantly boost a university's ranking and provide students with valuable opportunities.

Hiring Prestigious Professors is understood to be imperative; management is prioritizing the recruitment of top-tier academics to not only enhance the educational system but also to elevate the institution's ranking and reputation within the academic community. Various ranking methodologies heavily weigh factors such as academic achievements, the number of doctorates held by faculty members, and the quality of their published work. Moreover, appointing renowned scholars or leaders to key administrative positions can serve as a magnet for attracting other experts in the field, fostering a vibrant academic environment. However, the process of hiring faculty members is not a simple meritocracy, as indicated by research findings (Clauzet et al., 2015). Institutions may strive to emulate the success of prestigious universities by recruiting their graduates, but this approach overlooks the nuanced evaluation required for assessing long-term productivity and fit within the institution. Therefore, while hiring prestigious professors can

undoubtedly enhance an institution's standing, it is essential to navigate the complexities of the hiring process judiciously to ensure long-term success and alignment with institutional goals.

Increasing and encouraging international collaborations has been emphasised in an era characterized by unhindered communication and affordable travel, internationalization in higher education has been expanding worldwide. Universities are actively forming global alliances and nurturing connections with other institutions to capitalize on the opportunities presented by this trend. Notably, a significant portion of scientific publications globally are co-authored by individuals from diverse geographical locations (Knobel et al., 2013), underscoring the prevalence and importance of international collaborations. University collaborations offer many opportunities for students and faculty, including study abroad programs, staff exchanges, research opportunities, and enhanced cultural understanding. Moreover, joint curriculum development and degree programs with partner universities enrich teaching and learning experiences. However, establishing fruitful university collaborations is a time-consuming endeavour that necessitates a long-term commitment. Successful partnerships require careful consideration of organizational cultures, goals, and educational compatibility, alongside adaptability to evolving circumstances. Research suggests that developing personal relationships, particularly among staff members, is crucial for building sustainable collaborations (Knobel et al., 2013).

Improving graduate employability is a critical aspect that can be enhanced through effective leadership and management strategies. Top-ranked higher education institutions typically have high rates of graduate employment (Tomlinson, 2007). While external factors such as the labour market climate undoubtedly influence employability, programmes play a crucial role in educating and preparing students for the workforce. Incorporating individual or group inquiry, problem-based learning, and experiential activities can address key employability skills such as

teamwork, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and project management (Chhinzer & Russo, 2018). These learning experiences not only develop essential skills but also contribute to students' portfolios, showcasing their knowledge and capabilities to potential employers.

Collaboration and engagement within the academic sector are activities that can have considerable influence over university rankings and, by extension, their overall reputation. Research conducted by Dill and Soo in 2005 underscores this, also highlighting that a substantial segment of ranking metrics hinges on factors such as academic standing, research citations, and employer perception. Consequently, universities are strategically prioritizing initiatives aimed at bolstering their brand image to climb the rankings ladder, as noted by Altbach (2015). Moreover, fostering collaborations with other institutions and actively engaging with diverse sectors emerge as aspects of strategic activity. This dimension, echoed by Marginson (2007), emphasizes the importance of cultivating a global perspective and expanding exposure. By forging partnerships and participating in broader academic and economic dialogues, universities not only enrich their research endeavours but also cultivate their presence nationally and internationally.

Developing a university brand is crucial for enhancing its ranking and attracting a larger number of global students (Harvey, 2008). To achieve this, universities are focusing on establishing strong brand recognition. Building a distinguishable brand is seen as essential for improving international reputations (Merisotis, 2012). In addition to maintaining a strong online presence, universities are actively seeking student feedback to enhance their reputation. Surveys are a valuable tool for gathering student opinions and improving institutional standing through meta-analysis (Merisotis, 2012). Prioritizing the student experience and updating curricula to

reflect changing market dynamics and trends are essential for maintaining brand relevance (Merisotis, 2012).

Improving brand image through community engagement and communication is crucial for universities to differentiate themselves and attract prospective students. While universities can provide tangible information such as rankings and academic programs, prospective students also consider intangible aspects like brand image and personal preferences when making their decisions (Foroudi et al., 2019). Brand image encompasses both concrete and abstract representations and is influenced by consumer perceptions and connections (Patterson, 1999). It reflects the overall impressions a university creates in the minds of others and is shaped by marketing efforts as well as consumer backgrounds and beliefs. University brand image is a complex construct that may be challenging to assess due to its subjective nature and the diverse elements involved (Patterson, 1999). When prospective students have limited information, a university's ability to distinguish itself from competitors becomes crucial in their decision-making process (Panda et al., 2019).

Diversifying the faculty has become a priority for colleges and universities alongside efforts to build diverse student bodies. Research suggests that having a diverse faculty can improve performance among historically underrepresented groups, inspiring students to strive for higher levels of achievement and potentially enhancing institutional rankings (Boulton, 2011). To achieve a more diverse faculty, institutions can implement various strategies. These include revising employment policies to prioritize diversity, broadening the scope of job advertisements to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds, and implementing measures to reduce unconscious biases in hiring decisions, such as anonymizing resumes (Boulton, 2011).

Furthermore, providing education and training to faculty and staff can create a more inclusive workplace environment that attracts and retains diverse talent.

Expanding the number of courses offered in English is recognized by universities as a strategy to significantly improve their rankings (Jarocka, 2015). This type of initiative can attract a greater number of international students and employees but also enhances performance in internationalization ranking indicators, thereby bolstering global reputation (Hägg and Wedlin, 2013).

Improving the student experience is essential for universities to thrive in a competitive global context and maintain or enhance their rankings. Institutions increasingly recognize that the success and reputation of universities depend in part on the positive experiences of students and staff. In today's environment, students expect a high level of service and engagement from their educational institutions, viewing themselves as partners rather than mere recipients of knowledge (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). To meet these expectations, universities must prioritize delivering a high-quality student experience, which includes providing relevant resources and support for academic and career success (Clarke, 2007). Top-ranking institutions recognize the importance of investing in the student experience, as it not only fosters student success but also enhances the institution's reputation.

Routinely participating in international conferences is widely recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing a university's ranking and global reputation (Liu and Cheng, 2005). These conferences provide opportunities for universities to learn from their international counterparts, exchange academic research, and explore collaboration possibilities (Altbach, 2015). By attending such conferences, universities can establish and nurture international connections that may lead to future collaborations. Furthermore, international conferences offer universities valuable exposure



to the practices and strategies employed by renowned institutions worldwide, which can inform their own efforts to improve and excel (Altbach, 2015). Participation in these conferences also facilitates the recruitment of highly competent and knowledgeable faculty members, thereby enhancing the academic quality of the institution.

Hiring panels focused on quality in academic institutions is essential, particularly due to the potential consequences of hiring the wrong candidate. Panel interviews involve a candidate answering questions from a group of individuals who collaborate to reach a hiring decision, each contributing their unique experiences and viewpoints. Constructive criticism within the panel ensures a comprehensive evaluation process, addressing individual limitations. Staff recruitment and replacement come with significant costs, including productivity loss, training expenses, and the initial costs associated with new hires. Therefore, the efficiency of the interview panel is crucial in selecting the most suitable candidate. Poor hiring decisions not only result in financial and human resource losses but also damage the institution's reputation. While staff recruitment may not directly impact institutional ranking, maintaining a skilled workforce is aligned with the institution's developmental objectives and fosters a culture of excellence.

Investing in human capital is crucial for the success of Higher Education institutions in today's competitive landscape. Research indicates that such investment improves organizational performance, team effectiveness, retention, and creativity, potentially leading to higher rankings (Andersson & Konrad, 2003; Blundell et al., 2005). HEs prioritizing hiring, professional development, and fostering positive workplace cultures tend to achieve greater efficiency and outcomes. The internet has become the dominant place for job seekers, revolutionizing recruitment practices. To establish effective human capital systems, institutions must adapt to changing environments, including shifts in labour markets, technology, and communication. Best practices

include targeted recruitment efforts, comprehensive selection processes, creating conducive work environments, competitive compensation, and avenues for professional growth. Successful institutions also implement strategies to attract and support candidates from diverse backgrounds (Andersson & Konrad, 2003).

Selecting competent senior leaders is crucial for the direction and future success of Higher Education institutions. Effective governance in HE is inseparable from the collective actions senior leaders, truly effective teams are those where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Brown, 2007). Leadership teams members join for diverse reasons and have different levels of experience.

## **7.6 Strategic Planning and its Application to Saudi Vision 2030**

Considering all the specificities of Saudi higher education raised by the interviewees and wider literature, it is critical to emphasize the significance of strategic planning. Strategic planning could be defined as the process used for the attainment of an organisation's vision for the future in compliance with its goals and objectives. Strategic planning requires establishing the sequence, actions, and allocations of resources to allow an organization or a country's objectives to be realized. Strategic planning is critical for organizations, large entities, or even countries that have ambitious long-term goals. As the discussion of previous reforms concluded, the educational system has been so far unable to attain the changes and reforms set for the system of education. In the current context, the higher education system and individual universities have to establish a strategic plan in order to attain the objectives set in the Saudi Vision 2030.

The application of strategic planning will assist in establishing a long-term course of development for higher education through the implementation of its main features, such as attention to vision, mission, analysis, core values, goals, objectives, and action plans. The significance of each of these steps is paramount for the system, as is setting goals according to key performance indicators (KPIs) and setting budgets. A Saudi Vision 2030 Achievement Booklet (2020) has been released to update the public on progress towards the strategic goals of this substantial reform.

Overall, the Saudi Vision focuses on the most important areas of development critical for the country, including economy, culture, and integration. Education is part of the economic plans of Saudi Vision 2030 to support and sustain the diversification of the country's economy. The Saudi Vision 2030 implies that improvement in education in general and in tertiary education, in particular, could assist the country in a long-term ambition of economic diversification. By aiming to raise Saudi universities in the global context, the country follows the Saudi Vision in producing a workforce that will generate novel ideas regarding the country's economic progress and diversification. By increasing the quality and efficacy of tertiary education, Saudi Arabia seeks not only to become more competitive in the international market but to also prepare its workforce for economic integration, international collaboration, and growth of the internal economy.

Strategic planning in Saudi Vision 2030 is also embodied in the introduction of the new educational incentives at the local and national levels. The ambition to improve the country's higher education was supplemented by several incentives implemented within the period from 2016 to 2020. As reported in the Saudi Vision 2030 Achievement Booklet (2020), the country increased the number of its scientific programs for children and students in universities, which

allowed them to participate in research, conduct experiments, develop research-based thinking, and publish their work. Postgraduates also received more opportunities to be involved in scientific research as part of the incentive of increasing the country's scientific impact locally and globally. These incentives are not only directed to the prestige of Saudi Arabia or its universities but also to the long-term strategic goal of becoming a country with a developed, diversified, and progressive economy that has more than one source of wealth creation.

There has been progress in education towards creating a well-trained, talented workforce that can assist the country towards better integration. Such an approach to higher education in Saudi Arabia is evidence of the strategic planning embedded in Saudi Vision 2030. Even though the global pandemic has affected the short-term plans of the country for improving its higher education, the Saudi Vision is progressing across the country. Local authorities opened educational and recreational neighborhood clubs, which are directed toward value-development, volunteering, and community service, with 1.7 million people joining them (Vision 2030 Achievement Booklet, 2020). Other educational initiatives included virtual life skills development courses, which provided education to students during the quarantine. One of the most notable changes is the increase in authorship in Saudi Arabia, which is evidenced by the rise of the works of literature by 187%. Other changes included an increase in women in the workforce, from 19.4% to 33.2%, the proportion of children engaged in kindergarten, from 13% to 23%, and the number of scientific papers published from Saudi universities and scientific institutions (from 15,056 to 33,588 articles). In addition, the Saudi educational system launched a number of scientific programs for children, including innovative digital labs, the Saudi Digital Academy, and entertainment pioneers' program. These outcomes above are evidence of the progress (Vision

2030 Achievement Booklet, 2020) made by the education system, authorities, and scientific organizations.

Notwithstanding, no specific results have been reported concerning improvements in the position of higher educational establishments. The following table (Table 1) is based on the criteria used by the QS World University Rankings (2022) and includes the recommended focus for improvement arising from this research to support Saudi universities in meeting the strategic goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Academic Reputation</b>	Invest in reputation management, brand building and associated enhancement activities.
	Align national agency programmes with individual institutions. Design and implement a large-scale survey to gather data on academic reputation and related activity.
<b>Employer Reputation</b>	Review and invest in employee experience and prioritise work environment. Increase of internship programs and strategic collaborations with other employers.
	Improvement and investment in professional learning and development pathways and options towards excellence.
<b>Faculty/Student Ratio</b>	Reduction of teaching hours for staff and an increase of faculty members in universities to reduce the ratio in line with high-ranking institutions.
<b>International Research Network</b>	Invest in and routinely promote and invest in international collaborations and international conference attendance.
<b>Citations per Faculty</b>	Support research development and invest in faculty research initiatives.
	Consideration should be given to a mandatory research quota published by faculty being increased by 15%.
<b>International Student Ratio &amp; International Faculty Ratio</b>	Action should be initiated to significantly increase the number of international students enrolled in universities with the potential to rise in the global ranking.
	Action should be initiated to further internationalise faculty in the countries universities with the potential to rise in the global ranking.
<b>Analysis of Performance</b>	Develop systems of monitoring to provide data on all ranking related criteria.

Table 1: Recommended Strategic Improvement Actions

Following from this research, actions are proposed (Table 1) for strategic improvement within the next development period (2022-2030). This plan considers the progress that has been made during the period from 2016 to 2020 discussed earlier. This list of actions is presented using the 'performance' lenses used by QS World University Rankings (2022) only by way of illustration. The actions include the need to consider ongoing monitoring efforts to ensure that progress is made in the timeframe set by the 2030 vision strategy. Specifically, it is recommended to focus on the improvement of academic reputation attached to institutions with the short-term potential to rise in the rankings. As recognized, the reputation of higher educational establishments is a key to success in the long-term strategy contained in the Saudi Vision 2030. Yet, since it is unclear how Saudi universities assess their reputation, it is critical that they elaborate a system of criteria or apply one of the systems implemented in reputable universities. By using criteria for the analysis of reputation, universities have more potential to manage improvement. Reputation improvement could be supported by providing faculty with better professional development opportunities. For example, universities could organize professional forums for educators, develop courses and accreditation, and fund professional development learning opportunities. The faculty-student ratio needs to be managed towards ratios recognised globally as low.

## **7.7 Strategic Issues Raised by Interview Data and Scholarly Literature**

The respondents contributed generously to the data gathering phase of this enquiry. They explained their understanding of the specificities of the current higher education in Saudi Arabia or the UK regarding the international rating systems, the current state of the sector, and their perceptions of the road towards progress. The Saudi participants recognized the overall

improvement in their universities in terms of academic research, investment in training and professional development, and improvement of the international reputation of their institutions and the entire system of higher education in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, no specifics were reported concerning new efforts at improvement or programs available for the faculty. No information on international collaborations or involvement of international faculty was provided by participants. It has been acknowledged that higher education in Saudi Arabia has been through several phases of reform, which were significant but fall sort of today's ambitions. At the same time, Saudi Vision 2030 was developed, incorporating the area of education and higher education, including seeking to improve national competitiveness in the international education market. The following (figure 1) presents the areas for action suggested for Saudi universities based on the analysis of interview data and the literature on ranking systems and ranking improvement:

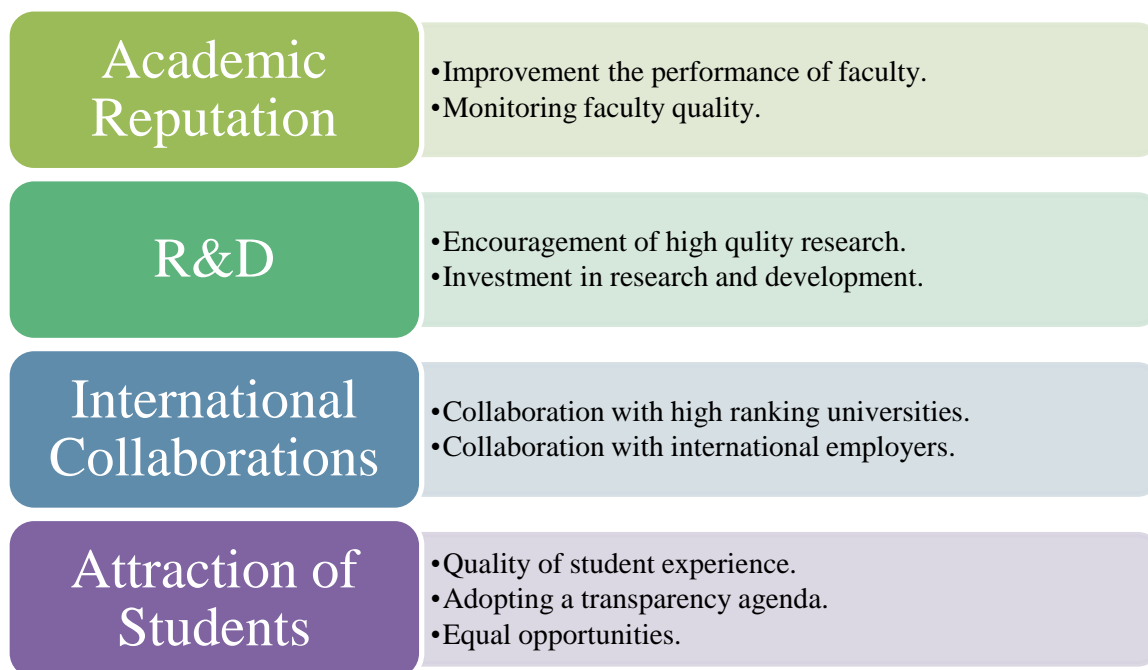


Figure 1: Areas of Improvement



The evaluation of the interview data identified issues that should be given emphasis by university administrators pursuing higher global ranking and enhancing the reputation of their institution. Leading among them is the demand for producing high-impact research and offering a premium education and learning conditions that can attain recognition worldwide. Building a reputation requires a significant effort supported by financial resources. National governments may need to act if any Matthew effect is to be weakened and universities are to push above a glass ceiling on reputation. Unless a university has an elite historical reputation keeping it in the public eye, advertising and marketing are essential. The attention of potential international students needs to be drawn to the enhancements and successes that universities have achieved in recent years. Interviewees from both countries reported that reputation is partially dependent on perceptions, which requires positive promotion. Some rankings, such as THE and QS Ranking, have a subjective element. University administrators need to comprehend that there are empirical as well as subjective aspects to international ranking and that online presence and identity require the allocation of resources. Focusing on the quantitative element alone, which includes the quality of education and learning and research output, would not automatically produce higher esteem and recognition. There is a requirement to advertise the achievements, contributions, and areas of excellence that an institution has achieved. The interviewees from the UK recognized the significant role that research played in constructing university credibility and ranking position.

Several contributors identified the centrality of research in developing an online reputation. An interviewee drew attention to their institutional objective to raise their Nobel prize holders from four to five (PCPR, 2020). The Academic Position of World Universities (ARWU) is just one of the most prominent ranking systems, which utilizes standings in six elements, amongst them is the number of Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (Safón & DoCampo, 2020; Hou &

Jacob, 2017). It weighs around 30 percent of ranking calculations when honours by graduates as well as awards by present faculty members are included. Nonetheless, Vernon et al., (2018) argue that Nobel Prizes are a luxury requirement that favour distinguished colleges in ranking.

It is not only producing research that counts in ranking, but there is also a demand for global collaboration, producing research studies that have an international influence (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). For instance, an interviewee asserted that they “have imported some professors from outside the college to lead some research groups” (PCPR, 2020). Internationalization of research improves the universities placing as it is among the criteria in 3 prominent rankings (Hou & Jacob, 2017). In the UK, the interviewees acknowledged the relevance of international collaboration in research as adding to the credibility of the institution. As an interviewee recognized, it is necessary to establish ‘interactions,’ particularly with other academics around the globe and with high status universities in the field.

Another interviewee declared that to construct credibility around research, the university needed to generate projects collaboratively with other eminent research institution. Buckner (2020) discusses the role that worldwide collaboration plays among institutions, enhancing the quality of research study outcomes and helping the global position of universities. Higher education organizations are moving from the nationalization of goals and approaches to the internationalization of objectives and methods to align with the significance of economic globalization to national economies (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). Buckner (2020) reviews the rising trend of the Global Research Universities (GRUs), which are colleges that concentrate on international-oriented study, international ranking, and their “ability to draw in high calibre worldwide students as well as faculty.” A concentration on the internationalization of research is a way of legitimizing colleges’ position with regard to influencing stakeholders’ perceptions.

Safón & DoCampo (2020) discuss institutional frameworks as another way in which colleges can construct their credibility. To have an appropriate framework, a university has to have a framework that matches with those of respected institutions. They require to provide graduate programs in addition to undergraduate programs. Their doctorate programs should be able to draw in high-ability candidates who can produce an identification through their doctoral studies (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017). Their doctoral candidates and faculty need to have the ability to carry out research that can be published in ranking journals along with attracting income for research from government as well as non-governmental organizations (Safón & DoCampo, 2020).

This aligns with the objective of drawing in academics and international students, one interviewee explained that “we try to find the most effective people internationally to lead research teams (PCPR, 2020). The need to draw in academics from the global market is reflected in another interviewee’s responses, claiming that “the team in the university needs to actually be international due to the fact that the university desires the very best individuals that will benefit it” (PCPW, 2020).

To have a global outlook, an institution needs to hire its academics without regard to nationality seeking to obtain the best in the field. The main obstacle to institutional restructure is that institutions take on characteristics or become uniform in their systems, while it might take a minimum of thirty years for adjustment of the institutional framework to influence its credibility internationally. Safón & DoCampo (2020) gives the instance of Tsinghua College in China, which made institutional reforms in the 1990s by including brand-new programs, restoring old distinguished programs, as well as combining with various other establishments. These structural reforms now support its existing track record though they are derived from previous restructuring. An interviewee discussed structural reforms mentioning that “in 2004, the university came to be a

larger institution, it combined with various colleges to develop a brand-new university” (PCPR, 2020). The effects of structural and organisational reform on reputation might take two decades to be really felt. For instance, an interviewee noted the case of colleges in Singapore that have improved in global ranking only in the past 20 years (PCPW). Nevertheless, events like positive attention can increase the diffusion of reputation.

As one interviewee in the UK stated, his university has a “great online reputation for a place to study” (PCPR). Another declared that “the quality of education is high as well as the college being recognized for that” (PCPW). The ARWU refers to this motif as the quality of education, the QS Ranking describes it as an academic track record, and the Times Higher Education (THE) describes it as an outcome (Hou & Jacob, 2017). They all place considerable weight on the quality of education or online scholastic reputation (Hou & Jacob, 2017; Vernon et al., 2018). The efficiency of alumni in the task marketing may likewise depend on the quality of students an institution draws in, which gives a potential benefit to universities with an elevated reputation (Hou & Jacobs, 2017). Impacts on places and the economy are necessary, such achievements reveal that an institution is generating research impact. An interviewee in the UK reflected that “so, you anticipate the college influences the policy advancement for the federal government, so the college works collaboratively on R&D with companies.” In this instance, the university is seeking to add to applications of research in the case of the private sector as well as the development of public policy. For this university to have an impact on places and the economy, its research must be relevant to challenges in society and in the commercial context.

When it comes to the Saudi Arabia interviewees, the quality of education and learning is also measured by the conduciveness of the environment for learning, which includes the friendliness of peers. It was recognized that education programmes ought to produce comparable

outcomes for minority populations and dominant groups. The success of colleges can also be observed by how it incorporates learners from various countries as well as from minority groups within its national boundaries. An interviewee in the UK identified the place that Chinese learners play in their university, suggesting that although they have a considerable number of international students, the ambition was to extend the diversity of nationalities rather than relying on Chinese learners. The capacity to bring in a more diverse population of international students depends upon the institution's ranking position as well as reputation.

Overall, the literature, as well as the analysis of interview data, indicated that university authorities and leaders are concerned to invest their efforts and resources into the establishment of a set of goals directed towards the reputation of the university.

A number of key points and connections between the findings of this study and the research questions can be highlighted. The interviewees and literature suggest the importance of improvement in research quality, faculty development, and institutional reputation. The Saudi Vision 2030 emphasizes investment in education, science, and research. This aligns with the objective of understanding how Saudi institutions are being encouraged to interpret quality and worldwide recognition. Positive developments in research and reputation open the way to progress toward global rankings. The findings highlight the significance of high-impact research, quality education, and reputation building for universities. The role of international collaboration and the emphasis on research in the UK have been noted. This addresses the second research question about the elements impacting the growth of Saudi universities and their recognition on a global scale. Research output and international collaboration are again identified as key factors. International collaboration is seen as crucial for improving university rankings. The data analysed emphasizes the importance of collaborative research with leading global institutions for

enhancing the reputation of institutions. This connects to the fourth research question concerning paths to global recognition while retaining Saudi identity. Collaborative international research is recognized as a prime strategy for legitimacy and influence.

The role of institutional frameworks and structural reforms in building university credibility has been noted together with the need for a diverse faculty population, relevant programmes of study, and global perspectives in hiring. This aligns with the third research question concerned with internal and external constraints affecting the Saudi higher education sector. Structural reforms are suggested as a means to overcome such challenges and positively impact reputation.

The findings emphasize the importance of the quality of education, academic reputation, and the impact of alumni success on university rankings. Also noted is the role of international students in enhancing diversity. This addresses aspects of the fourth research question about incorporating global quality standards while maintaining Saudi identity. The focus on the quality of education aligns with the pursuit of international standards.

The discussion has also have covered the challenge of reputational bias in ranking systems and the importance of overcoming this through positive publicity and improved perceptions. This connects to the first and fourth research questions, emphasizing the need for understanding both objective and subjective elements in international rankings.

Progress involves strategic efforts around investing in faculty development, encouraging high quality research, fostering international collaboration, and attracting high calibre international students through competitive programmes. This reinforces the need for the continual exploration of paths for Saudi universities to reach global rankings by adopting and adapting international practices and building collaboration on a global scale.

## 7.8 Reflections on Challenges and Opportunities

The undertaking of this study allowed me to investigate an urgent issue affecting the education system of Saudi Arabia and provided me with a platform to conduct a timely enquiry. This experience has been instrumental in refining my critical thinking and research capabilities, marking a significant milestone in my academic and professional journey.

Embarking on research of such magnitude was a novel experience, and it has ignited a desire within me to engage in similar projects in the future. I am keen on developing further my research skills and contributing to the body of knowledge in this field. The interactions with esteemed educational leaders from diverse higher education institutions in both Saudi Arabia and the UK was a privilege. These engagements provided me with valuable insights into the higher education systems of both countries, and I am enthusiastic about maintaining these connections for potential collaborations on future projects.

However, it's imperative to acknowledge the challenges encountered during this project. The omnipresence of the COVID-19 pandemic posed considerable obstacles, making it challenging, and in some instances, nearly impossible to conduct in-person interviews with certain respondents. The resulting quarantine measures necessitated a rescheduling of data collection activities involving participants. Moreover, given the qualitative exploratory nature of this research, the sample size was limited due to lockdown restrictions. Face-to-face interactions with participants were deemed crucial for the success of this study.

Furthermore, the unavailability of data pertaining to the progress of higher educational establishments in Saudi Arabia with respect to Saudi Vision 2030 posed a significant challenge. Participants were reticent in divulging information regarding universities' progress, leaving a gap in understanding of the approaches or actions taken to achieve the strategic objectives outlined in

Saudi Vision 2030. This limitation underscores the need for future research to delve deeper into these aspects, shedding light on the intricacies of the vision's implementation within the higher education landscape.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize a nuanced challenge that emerged during the course of this research — the selective nature of information provided by elite individuals and senior leaders within the educational domain. While engaging with these esteemed figures, it became apparent that not all aspects of their knowledge and insights were readily shared. The intricacies of certain institutional developments, especially concerning the progress towards Saudi Vision 2030, were often veiled in a shroud of confidentiality.

This selective disclosure poses a challenge to researchers attempting to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape. It is plausible that elite individuals, constrained by strategic considerations, might refrain from divulging specific details or may provide information that aligns with certain narratives. This aspect introduces an inherent limitation to the research, highlighting the complex dynamics involved in accessing privileged information within the echelons of educational leadership.

The subtle reticence observed among senior leaders underscores the need for researchers to navigate not only methodological challenges but also to cultivate a keen awareness of the potential gaps in the information presented. The dynamics of power and influence within educational institutions can impact the transparency of information-sharing, necessitating a more nuanced and careful approach in extracting insights.

Future research endeavours in the field should acknowledge this aspect and consider employing diverse methodologies, such as triangulation of data from multiple sources, to mitigate the potential impact of selective information disclosure. Building trust and fostering ongoing



relationships with key stakeholders may also contribute to a more open exchange of information over time.

While this study has been a valuable learning experience and has laid the groundwork for future enquires, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges faced and the areas that warrant further exploration and investigation. This reflective analysis not only underscores the importance of adaptability in research but also emphasizes the evolving landscape of educational research in the context of global challenges.

## **7.9 Further Research**

It is hoped this study will lead to further research on the topic of higher education in Saudi Arabia in connection to the Vision framework. This study recognized that modern Saudi universities are on the right track concerning their improvement and development. At the same time, it is unclear how these universities improve in connection to the international rating system if the main ambition is to occupy at least five positions in the rank of the top 200 universities worldwide. It is critical that future research would focus on such topics as building and developing the research identity for a university, collaborations with world-class universities for development, and a deeper understanding of the ranking systems.

It is recommended to explore the practical side of this issue and determine how, for example, the universities that occupy the first ten positions in the rating are able to retain their status quo and continue to operate as the eminent educational institutions. Future studies could use a case study design as the methodology for exploring this phenomenon. Considering the issues detected by this study, it is possible to explore R&D in Saudi Arabia, primarily how the

system of research and publishing works in the country. One of the gaps determined by this study was the lack of research published by faculty in comparison with the Western universities.

While this issue is addressed by multiple scientific programs that have been launched in the country, it is critical to determine how to improve this situation. For example, future research could investigate the system of conducting research and publishing by analysing the requirements for the studies articulated by different Saudi Arabia scientific journals, compliance with these requirements among scholars, and available programs that foster research publishing. In addition, the study could use a quantitative survey design by involving Saudi faculty members in order to discover how many scientific studies they publish, if they are encouraged to publish by the universities, and how the system works.

Other topics that could benefit from research include academic autonomy and resource attraction in Saudi universities. To assess the efficacy of these systems, it is possible to compare them to similar systems existing in the UK and the U.S. It would be practical to analyze the establishment of the higher education system and eminent universities located outside of the Western hemisphere. For example, several South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese universities are included in the 200 of the best universities at present. By analysing the universities in regions outside of the Western countries, it is possible to determine how they reached the level of excellence and its interaction with their authentic culture. Saudi Vision 2030 aims at maintaining its cultural uniqueness as well as fostering development and technological progress. Thus, analysing educational systems in the countries that preserved their authenticity could be informative for future research in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Another issue that was mentioned in interviews and the analysis of the ranking system is the significance of the reputation and brand image of the university. Saudi higher educational

establishments do not pay much attention to this aspect, which could be researched by future studies. It would be critical to find out if the faculty and educators take care of their image and reputation and if universities consider the reputation of their employees when hiring them or monitoring their work.

It would be interesting to consider how academics view specific reputational rules and requirements. It is critical to measure the extent to which Saudi universities have collaboration programs with international universities and scholars. Today's international university recruits international faculty and attracts students from abroad. The understanding of Saudi universities, in relation to internationalisation deserves to be explored by future research.

#### **7.10 Conclusion**

This study aimed at exploring strategic advice related to how Saudi universities could attain the primary educational objectives of the Saudi Vision 2030 and integrate the country's higher education facilities into the global context by promoting five institutions into the top 200 universities in global rankings. The study considered what has been done since the establishment of the Saudi Vision 2030 framework in 2016, what challenges exist, what improvements were made, and how to proceed towards this ambitious goal.

The study chose a qualitative exploratory design to attain the research goals and answer the research questions. The enquiry generated a set of results and recommendations, specifically, the study acknowledged that the Saudi authorities have established multiple reform programs in secondary and higher education to improve the system and the skills and opportunities of students. Research among academic faculty was encouraged, leading to an increase in the

publication of scientific articles. Universities have invested in the training and professional development of academic staff. Multiple collaborations with international higher educational establishments have been in operation.

At the same time, strategically important dimensions for improvement were elaborated. Mainly, the need to continue encouraging high-quality research, to build the reputation of universities through the advancement of standards for faculty, and to become more transparent around system performance. The government of Saudi Arabia has a key role in supporting universities by providing a policy framework, funding and resources. It is critical to remember that Saudi Vision 2030 is an initiative belonging to the government and requires their assistance in supporting institutions in fulfilling the framework's objectives. Media attention and marketing are critical for promoting the reputation of institutions in the system that have the potential to enter the upper cohort. International students and faculty must be encouraged to enter Saudi universities, it is also critical to continue investing in the establishment of equal opportunities for women in academia and scientific role.

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## Appendix 1

### (1) Saudi Arabia Interviews Questions

- 1- What are the major strategies the university seek for in order to raise its position in ranking table?
- 2- Is there one thing in particular that has made noteworthy difference in the university's position in ranking table?
- 3- What are the key factors that positively influence the development of the university and let it to be recognized amongst the best universities in the world and improve the reputation of the university?
- 4- What are the major external and internal problems that hinder the development of the university and influencing the quality of it? And how will you come over them?
- 5- How could the university's operators ensure the university to be on the pathway to become integrated into the world educational community applying global standards, yet maintaining the Saudi identity?
- 6- What is the biggest motivation for the university to accept the challenge and achieve better results in the ranking competition?
- 7- Do you work on developing your stats in a specific category of ranking systems' categories? How and why?

**(2) UK Interviews Questions**

1. What are the key factors that have positively influenced the development of the university and resulted in it being recognized as amongst the best universities in the world? What are the key challenges?
2. What are the strategies for improving the reputation of the university that have been most effective and successful?
3. What are the major external and internal challenges that might negatively influence the University's ranking? How have you responded?

## Appendix 2



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement

#### Study title and Researcher Details

My name is **Abdulaziz Alanazi**. I am a doctoral student at the University of Glasgow. As part of my studies, I am carrying out a research project. The title of the project is:

**Achieving Global Recognition: Higher Education Rankings and Commitment to Quality in Saudi Arabia's 2030 Strategic Vision.**

#### 1. Invitation

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. Because of your experience and position, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview. This interview is going to be focused on the strategies for reforming higher education system that effectively help higher education institutions rank high in universities' ranking tables. You will be provided with full information regarding the scope and aims of this research study. If you would have any questions about any aspect of the research please ask me. Please be aware that you can withdraw from the interview at any stage and you do not need to provide me with an explanation. You are also free to opt out of answering any question if you choose to do so.

After reading this Plain Language Statement if you will agree to take part in this project; please give your consent by filling out the attached consent form. Thank you for taking time to consider my invitation.

#### 2. What is the purpose of this study?

This study will focus on developing strategic advice that will enable the government to achieve the policy goal: "in 2030, at least 5 Saudi universities should rank amongst the top 200 universities worldwide" (<https://vision2030.gov.sa/en/media-center>). The study will gain insights into the complexities of the Saudi Arabian sphere of higher education benching marking these against the sector higher education in the United Kingdom that is tightly aligned with the global rankings system. The objective of this research is to suggest solutions to overcome the potential challenges facing Saudi Arabian higher education, to ensure they are on the best route to the 2030 Saudi Vision roadmap.

The planned output linked to answering the research questions is to develop strategic advice that is sensitive to cultural context for reform and improvement within the higher education sector of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the context of the 2030 Saudi Vision.

**3. Why have I been chosen?**

You have been selected because you are one of the key people in a higher education institution which always ranks amongst the top 200 universities worldwide or one of hardworking people who work on achieving the set goal mentioned above.

**4. Do I have to take part?**

It is totally up to you. You are free to opt out of this research study at any stage of the interview or at any time. You do not need to provide an explanation for your withdrawal.

**5. What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be invited to take part in an interview. It will be conducted at a place and time convenient to you and last for around 45 minutes. You will be asked various questions in the strategies of climbing universities ranking table and perhaps the obstacles you might had. You will be free to express your opinions and discuss your experiences about the topic. With your permission the interview will be audio recorded and the recording will be kept in a secure location. The audio recording will be transcribed by me and will then be used in my research, to identify common themes across the responses collected from other participants.

**6. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

**Data will be gathered and coded by numbers or letters rather than the names of participants, and once the data has achieved its purpose, it will be destroyed. Access to computer files will be available by password only and, after analysis, the data will be destroyed in the presence of the researcher and the supervisors.**

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

**7. What will happen to the results of the study?**

After analyzing, the results of this study will be used to create tentative conclusions to help in developing a strategic advice sensitive to cultural context, for the higher education system reform to reach the fifth objective of the 2030 Saudi vision educational objectives: "By 2030, at least 5 Saudi universities should rank amongst the top 200 universities worldwide".

**8. Who is organising and funding the research? (If relevant)**

Saudi Cultural Bureau

**9. Who has reviewed the study?**

The project has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

To conduct this research project, I would be working under supervision of

- 1- Dr. Robert Doherty



Tel No: +4401413303091

Email Address: [Robert.doherty@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Robert.doherty@glasgow.ac.uk)

**2- Dr. Kirsty Finn**

Tel No: +4401413301844

Email Address: [kirsty.finn@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:kirsty.finn@glasgow.ac.uk)

**10. Contact for Further Information**

If you wish to have further information about this study, you may contact me by email at

[XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk) .

Should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can contact the College of Social Science Ethics Officer by contacting Dr Muir Houston:

[Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERATION**

**Appendix 3**



College of Social Sciences

**Consent Form**

**Title of Project: Achieving Global Recognition: Higher Education Rankings and Commitment to Quality in Saudi Arabia’s 2030 Strategic Vision**

**Name of Researcher: Abdulaziz Alanazi**

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement/Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be not be identified and a pseudonym will be used in any publications arising from the research.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment with MOE in Saudi Arabia arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I understand that the data collected from this research will be stored securely with my personal details removed and agree for it to be held as set out in the Plain Language Statement.

I consent  do not consent  to interviews being audio-recorded.

I agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant :  
.....

Signature

Date .....

## Appendix 4

### Staff and Postgraduate Research Application Form College Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Before completing this form, you should refer to the guidance notes available at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/#d.en.47306>  
3

And

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/informationforapplicants/>

This application form should be typed and submitted electronically along with supporting documents via the Research Ethics System: <https://frontdoor.spa.gla.ac.uk/login/>

Applications should be submitted **at least 6 weeks in advance** of the intended start date for data collection to allow time for review and completion of any amendments that may be required.

Please note that applications that require PVG Clearance or permissions to access participants will not be approved until the applicant can provide evidence of this.

#### 1 Applicant Details

<b>Staff Research Project</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Postgraduate Research Project</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Project Title</b>	
Achieving Global Recognition: Higher Education Rankings and the Commitment to Quality in Saudi Arabia's 2030 Strategic Vision.	
<b>Name of Applicant</b>	
Abdulaziz Hamoud Alanazi	
<b>School/Subject/Cluster/RKT Group</b>	
College of Social Sciences / Education	
<b>Student ID/Staff Number</b>	
XXXXXXXX	
<b>Programme Title (PGR Applications only)</b>	
PhD Educational Studies	

#### 2 Ethical Risks

This section **must** be completed and signed (in some form) by the appropriate parties, commenting on the research ethics risks involved in this project. **The application will be returned if this section is not fully completed.**

**PGR Applications – Supervisors** must complete and sign this section, approving submission for ethical review.

**Staff Applications – Applicant** must complete and sign this section, confirming submission for ethical review.

It should be clear from the comments provided that the potential risks have been considered and information provided on what they are, with evidence of what is to be implemented to mitigate these. You are advised to refer to the Risk Guidance at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

The risks involved in this research have been considered and found to be low risk.

The research involves semi-structured interviews with elite participants employed in higher education in the UK and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The interviews will be by appointment and will take place on the campus of institutions of higher education.

The focus of the research is operational and policy related issues and participants will be speaking in a professional capacity.

The researcher is familiar with both national contexts and speaks Arabic and English.

**Signed: Robert Doherty**

**Dated: 26/09/2019**

**3 All Researcher(s) including research assistants and transcribers (where appropriate)**

Title	First and Surname	Telephone	Email ( <i>usually UoG</i> )
Mr	Abdulaziz H Alanazi		XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk

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**All Supervisors, Principal first (where applicable)**

Title	First and Surname	Telephone	Email (usually UoG)
Dr	Robert Doherty	3091	<a href="mailto:Robert.doherty@glasgow.ac.uk">Robert.doherty@glasgow.ac.uk</a>
Dr	Kirsty Finn	1844	Kirsty.Finn@glasgow.ac.uk

#### 4 External Funding Details

(NB: If this project is externally funded, please provide the name of the sponsor or funding body.)

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#### 4a. Is this application being submitted to another Ethics Committee, or has it been previously submitted to another Ethics Committee?

Yes

No

(If yes: please provide name and location of the ethics committee and the result of the application.)

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#### 5 Project Details

<b>Start Date for Data Collection:</b>	When ethical approval is granted
(NB: This refers to data collection for the research covered in this application. This should be at least 6 weeks from the date of application submission.)	
<b>Proposed End Date of Research Project:</b>	01/10/2021
(NB: This date should be when you expect to have completed the full project and published the results e.g. date of award of PhD, journal article publication, end of funding period.)	

#### 6 Justification for the Research

Why is this research **significant** to the wider community? **What might be the impact** on your practice or on the practice of others? **Please outline the reasons** which lead you to be satisfied that the possible benefits to researchers, participants and others to be gained from the project justify any risks or discomfort involved.

This study will focus on developing strategic advice that will assist the government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to achieve the policy goal articulated in their strategic planning document: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision
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2030. In higher education the policy sets out an ambition that: “in 2030, at least five Saudi universities should rank amongst the top 200 universities worldwide” (<https://vision2030.gov.sa/en/media-center>).

This study has significance and potential benefits for the higher education sector and in particular stakeholders with responsibility for institutional leadership for the quality and reputation of institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The study will seek to offer advice and insights into the complexities of the Saudi Arabian higher education system: benching marking insights against the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and in particular institutions that are tightly aligned with success in systems of global rankings. The objective of this research is to inform policy and to give advice towards overcoming the challenges facing higher education in Saudi Arabian, helping to chart a route to the ambitions articulated 2030 Saudi Vision roadmap.

The research has the potential to impact practice through developing strategic advice that is sensitive to a cultural context. The outcome is aimed at supporting reform and improvement within the higher education sector of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the context of the newly developed 2030 Vision.

The main demands on participants will be for their time.

## 7 Research Methodology and Data Collection

### 7a. Method of data collection *(Tick as many as apply)*

<b>Face to face or telephone interview</b> <i>(Provide a copy of interview themes in a separate document. This does not need to be an exact list of questions but does need to provide sufficient detail to enable reviewers to form a clear view of the project and its ethical implications.)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Focus group</b> <i>(Provide details: themes or questions in a separate document. This does not need to be an exact list of questions but does need to provide sufficient detail to enable reviewers to form a clear view of the project and its ethical implications.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Audio or video-recording interviewees, focus groups or events</b> <i>(Ensure that permission is evidenced on the consent form. Details should be provided, either in theme/question information or separately.)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Questionnaire</b> <i>(Provide a copy of at least indicative questions in a separate document, final questions must be submitted as an amendment if not provided in initial application)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Online questionnaire</b> <i>(Provide the web address/ or electronic copy if not yet available online)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Participant observation</b> <i>(Provide an observation proforma)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Other methodology</b> <i>(Provide details – maximum 50 words)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 7b. Research Methods

**Please explain the reason for the particular chosen method(s), the estimated time commitment required of participants and how the data will be analysed.** Ensure that you include reference to methods of providing confidentiality as you indicate below in section 8a.

<p>This aspect of the study adopts a qualitative research approach as it will be based on broad and open-ended inquiry, and will seek different perceptions and perspectives related to the topic as well as exploring assumptions present in the policy climate. Within the constraints of this research this approach has been adopted as the most productive.</p> <p>Data will be gathered from key institutional actors using semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>A set of 45 minutes-length interviews will be had with participants in senior positions in different universities in KSA (5-7 participants) and UK (3-5 participants). Every interviewee will be asked a set of questions and their responses analysed thematically.</p> <p>The Interview questions will vary across the two participant sets: interviewees in KSA and interviewees in UK. There will be common questions and questions reflecting the fact that interviewees in the UK are members of higher education institutions that have already achieved the ranking that higher education institutions Saudi Arabian are seeking to achieve.</p> <p>All relevant data will be transcribed, and if required translated, relevant items and contributions will be analysis in order to code them. It is anticipated that categories will developed out of the codes by combining codes together making groups (themes). After labelling the categories, connections between them will be explored.</p>
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Confidentiality will be protected by the data being handled in a de-identified form. Subjects will be referred to by pseudonym in any publication arising from the research.

## 8 Confidentiality & Data Handling

### 8a. Will the Research Involve:

*\*You should select all options that apply to your (different) research methods (insert the name of the method in shaded box at top of each column, e.g. interview / questionnaire) and make clear in section 7b above how these will be applied.*

DEGREE OF ANONYMITY	(insert method) interviewing	(insert method) Document Analysis	(insert method)
<b>De-identified samples or data</b> (i.e. a reversible process whereby identifiers are replaced by a code, to which the researcher retains the key, in a secure location?)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Anonymised samples or data</b> (i.e. an irreversible process whereby identifiers are removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers. It is then impossible to identify the individual to whom the sample of information relates)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Complete anonymity of participants</b> (i.e. researchers will not meet, or know the identity of participants, as participants are part of a random sample and are required to return responses with no form of personal identification)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
USE OF NAMES			
<b>Subject being referred to by pseudonym in any publication arising from the research?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Participants consent to being named?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



<p><b>Any other methods of protecting the privacy of participants?</b> (e.g. use of direct quotes with specific, written permission only; use of real name with specific, written permission only):</p> <p><i>provide details here:</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Participants being made aware that</b> confidentiality may be impossible to guarantee; for example in the event of disclosure of harm or danger to participants or others.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Participants being made aware that</b> confidentiality may be impossible to guarantee; for example due to size of sample, particular locations etc.?</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Participants being made aware that</b> data may be shared/archived or re-used in accordance with Data Sharing Guidance provided on Participant Information Sheet?</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8b. Which of the following methods of assuring confidentiality of data will be implemented**

*(NB: The more ethically sensitive the data, the more secure will the conditions of storage be expected to be.)*

<p><b>Location of Storage</b></p> <p>Storage at School of Education University of Glasgow</p> <p>Stored at another site</p> <p><i>(Please provide details here, including address)</i></p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Paper</b>		

Data to be kept secure in locked room/facility/cabinet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Data and identifiers to be kept secure in locked room/facility/cabinet	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Electronic</b> Access to computer files to be available by password only	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Other</b> Any other method of securing confidentiality of data in storage: <i>(Please provide details here)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8c. Access to Data**

**Access by named researchers** and, where applicable, supervisors, examiners, research assistants, transcribers

Access by people **OTHER** than named researchers, supervisors, examiners, research assistants, transcribers

*If applicable: provide details of others who will have access; and if relevant, of data management and sharing policy or protocol*

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**8d. Retention and Disposal of Personal Data \***

**Explain and as appropriate justify your proposals for retention and disposal of any PERSONAL data to be collected.**

All personal data will be retained as long as required. The University requires that researchers deposit their research data safely in a repository; it will remain accessible for a minimum of ten years. At the end of this period, all data will no longer be retained. Papers documents will be shredded of and all electronic files will be deleted.
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“\* ‘personal data’ means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person;” Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 Chapter 1, Article 4, Definitions

The Data Protection Act 1998 is being replaced by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on 25 May 2018.

Further information on the GDPR is available on the webpages of the UofG Data Protection and Freedom of Information Office: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/gdpr/#>

### 8e. Retention and Disposal of Research Data

**Explain and as appropriate justify your proposals for retention and disposal of RESEARCH data to be collected.** Please consult *Data Management Support pages* for guidance:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/datamanagement/>

Data will be reserved for 10 years after completion of the research.

The University requires that researchers deposit their research data safely in a repository, where they can be cited using a persistent identifier (such as a DOI) and will remain accessible for a minimum of ten years.

For Postgraduate and Staff research University of Glasgow Research Guidelines expect data to be retained for 10 years after completion of the project. Please see University Code of Good Practice in Research for guidance,

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/ourresearchenvironment/prs/pgrcodeofpractice/>

## 9 Dissemination of Results

### 9a. Results will be made available to participants as:

*(NB: Intended method of dissemination ought normally to take account of the age, capacities and situation of participants.)*

Written summary of results to all if requested	<input type="checkbox"/>
Copy of final manuscript presented if requested (e.g. thesis, article)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Verbal presentation to all (e.g. information session, debriefing)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation to representative participants (e.g. CEO, School Principal)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other or None of the Above <i>(please provide details here)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--	--------------------------

**9b. Results will be made available to peers and/or colleagues as:**

Dissertation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thesis (e.g. PhD)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Submission	<input type="checkbox"/>
Journal Articles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Book	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Conference Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Written summary of results to all if requested	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other or None of the Above <i>(please provide details here)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**9c. Datasets suitable for future re-use will be:**

Openly available via a data repository (eg. UKDA, Enlighten, Research Data)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Available via a data repository but with restricted access	<input type="checkbox"/>
Available from the researchers by personal request	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other or none of the above <i>(please provide details here)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the data from this study will be suitable for future access and re-use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**10 Participants**

**10a. Explain how you intend to recruit participants. Provide as much detail as you can, including what age/type of group will be used for each research activity involved (e.g. Interviews)**

Working from a set of explicitly developed criteria, participants will be identified from publically available information as meeting the criteria for participation and will be sent an invitation including the informed consent information.

The participant group for the Interviews is comprised of senior officers in universities or in government roles related to higher education. One of the main criteria is seniority in relation to leadership, strategic planning and or quality. Participants would fall within group understood in research terms as researching elites. Participants will be mature professionals of some standing.

**10b. Target Participant Group**

Students or Staff of the University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adults (over 18 years old and competent to give consent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults (over 18 years old who may not be competent to give consent)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Young people ages 16-17 years old	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children under 16 years old	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you require information on the age of legal capacity please refer to the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991 available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/50/contents>

**10c. Incentives**

***If payment or any other incentive (such as a gift or free services) will be made to any participants please specify the source and the amount of payment to be made and/or the source, nature and where applicable the approximate monetary value of the gift or free service to be used. Please explain the justification for offering payment or other incentive.***

n/a

**10d. Number of Participants (if relevant give details of different age groups/activities involved)**

12 participants maximum.

**10e. Dependent Relationship**

**Are any of the participants in a dependent relationship with any of the investigators, particularly those involved in recruiting for or conducting the project?**

*(For example, a school pupil is in a dependent relationship with their teacher. Other examples of a dependent relationship include student/lecturer; patient/doctor; employee/employer)*

Yes

No

**If Yes: Explain the relationship and the steps to be taken by the investigators to ensure that the subject's participation is purely voluntary and not influenced by the relationship in any way.**

--

**10f. Location of Research**

University of Glasgow	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outside Location <i>(Provide details here of outside locations, including as much information as possible.)</i>  <i>Universities in Saudi Arabia:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- King Saud University</li> <li>- King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals</li> <li>- King Abdulaziz University</li> <li>- King Fiasal University</li> <li>- King Khalid University</li> <li>- Qassim University</li> </ul> <i>Universities in The United Kingdom:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University of Glasgow</li> <li>- The University of Edinburgh</li> <li>- Durham University</li> <li>- The University of Manchester</li> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**11 Permission to Access Participants**

**11a. Permissions/Access**

Permission is normally required to gain access to research participants within an organisation (e.g. Private Company; school; Local Authority; Voluntary Organisation; Overseas institution, Academic institution, including UofG.)

**Is this type of permission applicable to this application?**Yes No **If No: Explain any reason why you do not require permission** to gain access to research participants.
**If Yes: Is evidence of this permission provided with** this application?Yes No **If evidence is not provided, please explain why.** Note that it must be forwarded to the ethics administrator as soon as it is available.

Permission will requested as the first stage of the recruitment process.

**11b. Does this application involve contacting University of Glasgow students directly (specifically either via email or within classes) for the purpose of your research?**Yes No **If Yes: *Separate permission to survey students'*** needs to be obtained prior to any such survey being undertaken. Normally this permission should be sought from the appropriate authority after ethical approval has been granted.See <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/informationforapplicants/>*(NB: Once obtained, a copy of this permission must be forwarded to the Ethics Administrator.)*

- **If applicable: list the students** that you intend to contact (*e.g. 30 students from X course*)

**12 Informed Consent**

The **Participant Information Sheet** is written information in plain language that you will provide to participants to explain the project and invite their participation.

(**You must consult the guidance** at the Forms and Guidance Notes section of the College ethics website <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/> for information that you are **required** to provide in this.)

**12a. Have you attached your Participant Information Sheet (alternative name: Plain Language Statement) for participants?**

Yes

No

**If No:** please explain:

**12b. Please note that a copy of this information should be offered to the participant to keep unless there are specific reasons for not doing so. These must be clearly explained below.**

**12c. Are any participants likely to require special consideration in the preparation of the Participant Information sheet, (alternative name: Plain Language Statement) to ensure informed consent? (Eg. the use of child friendly language, English as second language)**

Yes

No

**If Yes: Provide details here:**



**12d. How will informed consent by individual participants or guardians be evidenced?** (NB: In normal circumstances, it will be expected that written evidence of informed consent will be obtained and retained, and that a formal consent form will be used: a copy of which should be provided for review.)

Signed Consent Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recorded Verbal Consent	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Confirmed</b> by Return of Survey (Clear agreement of consent to use participant data must be evidenced at start of survey, e.g. by tick box)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please provide details here)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Justification if written evidence of informed consent is NOT to be obtained and retained:**

### 13 Monitoring

**Describe how the project will be monitored to ensure that the research is being carried out as approved** (e.g. give details of regular meetings/skype/email contact).

Supervisor will be fully aware of what I am doing to make sure that the research is conducted ethically, supervision meetings will be conducted every month.

### 14 Health and Safety

**What are the potential issues of personal safety for you, other researchers or participants involved in the project and how will you manage them?** (Other than lone field work – refer to Section 15 for this)

There are no health and safety issues beyond those of normal life and travel.

## 15 Risk

### 15a. Does the activity involve lone field work, lone working or travel to unfamiliar places? (E.g.

Carrying out interviews alone and off-campus) *NB: This does not apply to working within an institution such as a school.*

(You should refer to the Risk Guidance at:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/#d.en.473063>

Yes

No

**Give details of arrangements to minimise risks pertaining to this.**

**15b. How will you ensure that you minimise any possible distress caused to participants by the research process?** *The risk of potential disruption or negative consequences to the participants may not be obvious and you should consider this carefully as distress could be emotional, social or economic.*

The risk of potential disruption or negative consequences to the participants is low.

If during the interview at any time the participant becomes distressed the interview will be terminated and the appropriate officers in the institutions with a duty of care alerted.

**15c. What procedures are in place for the appropriate referral of a study participant who discloses an emotional, psychological, health, education or other issue during the course of the research or is identified by the researcher to have such a need?**

Each institution has its own procedures for supporting individuals with appropriate officers charged with a

duty of care. The procedures will be followed in the event of a disclosure.

**15d. Does this research involve any sensitive topics or vulnerable groups? You should refer to the Risk Guidance at:**

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/#d.en.473063>

Yes

No

**If Yes: Give details of arrangements to minimise risks** pertaining to this

**16 Insurance**

**Does this research come under the exclusions to the University insurance cover for research?**

Yes

No

**If Yes: Explain and detail how** you intend to cover the insurance needs for this research

The University insurance cover is restricted in certain, specific circumstances, e.g. the use of hazardous materials, work overseas, research into pregnancy and conception and numbers of participants in excess of 5000. Please refer to the Insurance and Indemnity advice on the website given below. Advice or authorisation given must be included with this application.

Information may be available at this link:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/finance/staffsections/insuranceandrisk/>

If you have a problem accessing this link, please try a different browser e.g. Firefox instead of Internet Explorer.)

## 17 Protection of Vulnerable Groups and Disclosure

**Does this project require Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) clearance?**

Yes

No

**If Yes: Evidence** that this has been obtained **MUST** be provided with this application.

**If PVG registration is held**, provide **details** here:

The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 came into effect on 28 February 2011. This replaced the previous Disclosure Scotland checking system for individuals who work with children and/or protected adults. The University is a Registered Body under this legislation.

Please consult the University Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme webpages for guidance:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/humanresources/mgrs-admin/mgr-guidance/pvgscheme/>

Further guidance is available from:

<https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-types/?via=http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/> [mygov.scot - Disclosure Scotland]

## 18 UK and Scottish Government Legislation

**Have you made yourself familiar with the requirements of the:**

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (May 2018)

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/gdpr/> this replaces the Data Protection Act (1998)

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

<http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Law/FOISA.aspx>

Yes

No

**If No: Explain here:**

See Application Guidance Notes available from:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/#d.en.473063>

for further information.

In addition visit: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/> for University guidance on Data Protection including GDPR

The **Freedom of Information Act 2002 (FOI)** provides a general right of access to most of the recorded information that is held by the University. The Act sets out a number of exemptions/exceptions to this right of access.

**Declaration must be signed in some form and dated. The application will be returned if it is not.**

## 19 Declarations by Researcher(s) and Supervisor(s)

**The application will not be processed if this section is blank or incomplete.**

- The information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate.
- I have read the University's current human ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application in accordance with the guidelines, the University's Code of Conduct for Research and any other condition laid down by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee and the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.  
*NB: Full details of the University's ethics guidelines are available at:*  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/aims/ourpolicies/ethics/>
- I and my co-researcher(s) or supporting staff have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached application and to deal effectively with any emergencies and contingencies related to the research that may arise.
- I understand that **no** research work involving human participants or data collection can commence until I have been granted full ethical approval by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

***This section MUST be completed to confirm acceptance of Code of Conduct. If there is no scanned signature then please type the names (or use GUID) and date into the boxes below.***

	Signature	Date
Researcher (All applicants)	Abdulaziz Hamoud Alanazi	6-6-2019
Principal Supervisor (Where applicable)	DR. Robert Doherty	26/09/2019

**For Supervisors – Please note that by submitting this application the supervisor confirms that:**

- The student is aware of the College ethics requirements.
- The topic merits further research.
- The student has the relevant skills to begin research.
- If interviewing, the student has produced an appropriate information sheet for participants.
- The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate.

**Applications should be submitted electronically as follows:**

Upload the completed form, along with any other required documents by logging in to the Research Ethics System at: <https://frontdoor.spa.gla.ac.uk/login/>

*NB: PGR students are required to upload their application which is then forwarded to their named supervisor for approval and submission to the Research Ethics Committee.*

26 November 2019

Dear Abdulaziz Hamoud Alanazi

**College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** : Achieving Global Recognition: Higher Education Rankings and the Commitment to Quality in Saudi Arabia's 2030 Strategic Vision

**Application No:** 400190031

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 26/11/2019
- Project end date: 01/10/2021
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you as the Collated Comments Document in the online system.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research:  
([https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_490311\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf))
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduatestudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston  
College Ethics Officer

## Appendix 5

### Part of Interviews Transcript

**Interviewee:** We are actively pursuing institutional accreditation, which involves meeting eight standards: quality of teaching, scientific research, community service, student affairs, among others. Improving these indicators will enhance our international ranking. To achieve these goals promptly, we have been focusing on specific performance indicators. At the beginning of the second semester, we aim to submit the university's self-study. Recently, we sent the self-evaluation criteria to an external reviewer. Each step brings us closer to improving our international standing. For example, we identified a weakness in the scientific output of faculty members' research. To address this, we implemented policies to support research and introduced the Research Excellence Award, presented by the University President. We anticipate these measures will significantly advance our goals. Additionally, non-Saudi faculty members, who comprise over 75% of our faculty due to their expertise in fields like medicine, engineering, and computing, are now required to publish under the university's name. Failure to comply may result in contract termination. They must publish at least one paper annually, which is linked to contract renewal and performance evaluation. Similarly, Saudi faculty members must publish at least one research paper per year, which is tied to their performance evaluations.

**Abdulaziz:** What are the university's primary strategies to improve its ranking? Does your previous answer align with these strategies?



**Interviewee:** Absolutely. The university's strategies include establishing a dedicated unit and implementing policies to enhance scientific research. Additionally, we have invested significantly in developing the university's website.

**Abdulaziz:** Is there any initiative that has significantly contributed to improving the university's ranking?

**Interviewee:** Yes, the concept of a research identity has been pivotal. This is a ministerial initiative aimed at advancing research across universities. Institutional accreditation is essential for development, particularly on an international scale. Saudi universities generally excel in student-teacher ratios and other metrics, but we lag in impact factors, scientific publishing, and participation in international conferences and awards such as the Nobel Prize. Recently, we hosted an international conference on sports psychology in XXX, attended by around 140 participants from countries including the United States, Germany, China, Japan, and Korea. The presence of His Highness XXX and the state's support, such as facilitating visas, contributed to the event's success. The Ministry has also launched a billion-riyal research identity initiative for universities, with an estimated 50 million riyals allocated to our university.

**Abdulaziz:** What does the term "research identity" mean?

**Interviewee:** Each university is required to develop a research identity that aligns with its strengths, resources, and aspirations. Given our historical association with University of XXX, our university has a strong engineering focus. Consequently, our research identity emphasizes

medical engineering due to our College of Medical Sciences' high national rankings. Although theoretical studies were initially underrepresented, they now support the engineering and medical research communities. As Dean of the College of Education, I advocated for a more balanced representation. Our research analysis over the past five years revealed a predominance of engineering and computing publications, solidifying our identity as a medical engineering institution. So far, only 11 universities, including ours, have established their research identity, and those who did early receive support. Currently, we are working on 22 papers that must be published in international journals and magazines to receive support, thereby improving our ranking.

### **The Process of Thematic Analysis**

- **Familiarization and Transcription:** The initial phase involves immersing oneself in the interview transcripts.
- **Generating Initial Codes:** Codes are systematically assigned to segments of the data records.
- **Searching for Themes:** The next step involves categorizing the codes into themes, illustrating the interconnected nature of concepts and aiding in the identification of underlying structures.
- **Naming and Defining Themes:** Each theme is assigned a name and description that encapsulates its essence, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the phenomena.
- **Report Writing:** The final stage involves synthesizing the identified themes into a comprehensive narrative that delves beyond surface-level observations, establishing connections between the observed patterns and the research questions

### **Themes Developed through the Saudi Arabia Interviews**

- Empowering Faculty for Enhanced University Performance.
- Enhancing Prestige Through Accreditation.
- Strategic Focus on Research Excellence.
- Enhancing Autonomy for Strategic Growth.
- Strategic Marketing for Enhanced University Reputation.
- Establishing a Prestigious Research Identity.
- Enhancing Academic Reputation.

### **Themes Developed through the UK Interviews**

- Critical Role of Academic Research.
- Programs and Institutional Accreditation.
- Quality of Education.
- Past Reputation.
- Need for Publicity.
- Marketing.
- Resource Attraction.